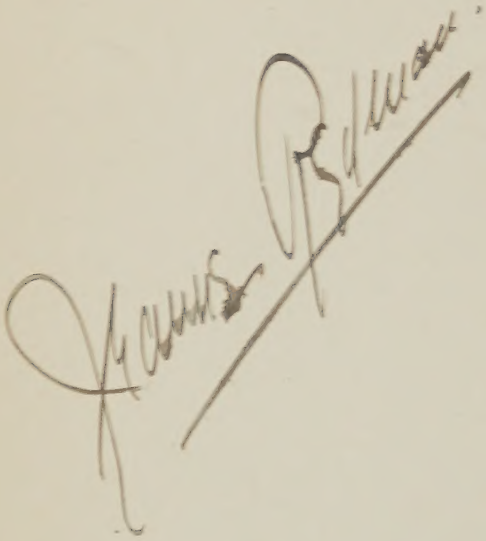
CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS

FRANK HARRIS



CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS

BOOKS BY FRANK HARRIS

THE VEILS OF ISIS
GREAT DAYS A Novel
THE BOMB A Novel
MONTES THE MATADOR
UNPATH'D WATERS
THE MAN SHAKESPEARE
THE WOMEN OF SHAKESPEARE
SHAKESPEARE AND HIS LOVE A Play

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SIR RICHARD BURTON
FROM THE ETCHING BY LEOPOLD FLAMENG

CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS

By

FRANK HARRIS

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INTRODUCTION

LIFE needs reporters, and creates them everywhere. Not a tree but keeps a tally of the winters and summers it has passed, and in its knots and nodes bears witness to the storms and strains it has endured.

Nature even, motionless and inarticulate Nature, is occupied with its autobiography, and preserves its record; buried forests write their history in coal-fields, forgotten seas depict their vicissitudes, and show us the form and imprint of their inhabitants in chalk cliffs and gravel-beds; the hardest granite and porphyry blocks testify to their fiery origin and describe the chief mishaps they have suffered. Even the blazing suns analyze themselves through the spectroscope, and invisible stars register their weight and orbit in the deflection of neighboring planets. Not a thought in the mind but inscribes itself in the furthest star, and the development of all sentient life from the dawn of time, is to be read again in the being of the youngest child.

And if all creation, from the sun to the grain of sand, tells its story and records its fate, how much the more shall man sing his sorrow and his

joy? For man is something more than a reporter; and that something more is the source and secret of his ineffable superiority: he is artist as well. He divines the hidden meaning in nature, the half-disclosed aim, and he does this by virtue of the fact that the eternal purpose works in him even more clearly than without him, and shows itself in his very growth. The artist is not content merely to report his sufferings and his pleasures, he makes epics of his adventures, dramas of his strugglings, lyrics of his love.

Accordingly when telling of the great men he has met and known the artist-reporter is a prey to conflicting duties. As a reporter he is intent on giving an exact likeness, scrupulously setting down just what his subject said; as an artist he wants to make the portrait a picture and therefore he elaborates and arranges—exaggerating or diminishing this or that feature—in order the better to express the very essence of his sitter's soul. And the sitter is never a fixed quantity; he is always changing, and whether developing or fossilizing has always possibilities in him, the infinite interest of what might have been or may yet be.

The obligation on the artist is to create—to make the greatest work of art possible, and there is no other. But still the questions tease: when and how far should one sacrifice truth to beauty, the actual to that which is in process of becoming, the real to the ideal? It seems to me that in proportion as

the subject is great, one is bound to adhere more closely to the fact. Truth is needed by the artist in order to make great men credible and their greatness comprehensible. Men of little more than ordinary stature may be handled with greater freedom.

One warning must be given here. When I reproduce conversations in this book and put the sayings of my contemporaries in inverted commas, it must not be assumed that these are literally accurate: they are my recollection of what took place. The reports are perhaps more exact than most memories would be for this reason; that from the moment of the talk I have been accustomed to tell the story of my meeting and conversation with this or that distinguished man almost as fully as I have set it down here. And once told, the tale was not afterwards altered by me, at least not consciously, and my verbal memory is unusually good. But I am always artist rather than reporter and pretend to spiritual divination and not to verbal accuracy.

I put these portraits forth, therefore, as works of art. "Here," I say to my readers, "are some of the most noteworthy of my contemporaries as they appeared to me."

New York, 1915.

CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS

CARLYLE

THE servant girl at his house told me that Mr. Carlyle had gone for his usual walk on Chelsea Embankment, so I went off to find him. It was a Sunday in June, about midday; the air was light, the sun warm; the river shone like a riband of silk in the luminous air.

My heart beat fast; I was going to meet the greatest of living men, the only one, indeed, of my contemporaries who spoke to me with authentic inspiration and authority. Browning I knew was among the Immortals, one of the very greatest of English poets; a thinker, too, of high impartial curiosity; but apart from his poetic gift, Browning seemed to me a well-read Englishman of ordinary stature, whereas Carlyle was of the race of the giants; like Luther, like Mahomet, one of the elemental forces of humanity. I see now that I rated him above his worth, mistaking literary gift and Biblical solemnity of manner for insight; but then I was all reverence and my heart was thumping—

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain?

What would he say to me—what memorable thing? Every time we had met he had said something I could never forget, something that would remain always as part of the furniture of my mind. What would he say to-day? What did I want him to talk about? He would not be directed: 'twas better to let him take his own course. . . .

He looked, I thought, the prophet; his clothes loose and careless, for comfort, not show; the shaggy, unkempt grey thatch of hair; the long head, the bony, almost fleshless face of one who had fasted and suffered; the tyrannous overhanging cliff forehead; the firm, heavy mouth and out-thrust, challenging chin—the face of a fighter; force everywhere, brains and will dominant; strength redeemed by the deepset eyes, most human, beautiful; by turns piercing, luminous, tender-gleaming; pathetic, too, for the lights were usually veiled in brooding sadness broken oftenest by a look of dumb despair and regret; a strong, sad face, the saddest I ever studied—all petrified, so to speak, in tearless misery, as of one who had come to wreck by his own fault and was tortured by remorse—the worm that dieth not.

Why was he so wretched? What could be the meaning of it?

Age alone could not bring such anguish? What crown had he missed? He had done so much, won imperishable renown; what more did he want? I

felt a little impatient with him. He had done his work, reaped a noble harvest:

> Die Zeit ist mein Vermaechtniss
> Wie herrlich weit und breit. . . .

I had only gone a few hundred yards when I caught sight of him walking towards me; he had a sort of loose cloak about him and a soft hat pulled down over his eyes. I suddenly realized that he was very old—an impression one never got when talking to him—his tall figure was shrunken together and much bent; he walked slowly, feebly, leaning heavily on a stout stick: my heart ached for him. He met me without a word; I turned and walked beside him in silence for some little time.

He seemed in his most habitual mood of brooding melancholy.

"Turner's house," I said at length, pointing to the house just to find a subject of conversation; "did you know him?" He looked across at the house and shook his head.

"I took no interest in him," he said, his tone one of tired indifference. . . . "Ruskin praised him extravagantly; but that landscape painting, if you think of it, is a poor thing in comparison with other painting or even with nature herself." (I cannot give his Scotch accent, my readers must imagine it; but it lent a special touch of individuality to all he said.) . . . "In every other art, man puts a soul

and meaning into his work, and that's what we value; but this" (and he waved his hand over the river) "is just beautiful as it is—pairfect without purpose. . . . There is healing in the air and sunshine; but the sun and air and water care nothing for man's dreams or desires; they have no part nor lot wi' us" . . . and he sighed deeply.

After waiting a little while I began again, pouring water into the pump:

"Lessing thought you could not render a landscape in words, but Goethe knew better, didn't he? He knew one could recall the impression if the scene to be pictured was at once striking and familiar. You remember:—

> Glatte Flaeche rings umher.
> Keine Luft von keiner Seite
> Todesstille fuerchterlich,
> In der ungeheuren Weite,
> Reget keine Welle sich.

"The words call up a summer sea sleeping breathlessly, with a magic of representment."

"Ungeheuren Weite," he repeated, with a strong English accent, "but what good is't? I'd rather have had one word of Goethe about man and man's work in the world, and man's destiny, than pages of such stuff. But about the important things of life he had little enough to say," and he sighed again. "None of us has much. . . . Goethe had a sort of belief in

immortality; a curious fragmentary hope for a few gifted men?" And he pursed out his lips, while the sad eyes held me with an unuttered question and appeal.

What was I to say? Comfort I had none to give, no gleam of hope: personal immortality being incredible to me, I had put the desire of it away. It hurt that he of all men should solicit the mere reflection or image of the hope—the hero-soul driven to this extremity by the loneliness of the long voyage. Like Columbus ("my hero") he had lived alone with the deeps below and above; contemptuous, envious, mutinous underlings about him, and in front the Unknown. It wrung my heart that I could only look my answer—"You have fought the good fight; left behind you a luminous path for all men for ever —that's your reward."

The sense of my utter impotence, the intensity of my sympathy, made me almost rude.

"I wonder you admire Goethe so much," I broke out. "His pose as the high and mighty Trismegistus kills him for me as it killed him for Heine. I always see him in his court dress, bestarred, beribboned, bepowdered, sitting on the old feudal wall, dangling buckled pumps and plump calves above the heads of common folk. He had too easy a time of it in life, had Goethe. There is generally something common, greedy, vulgar in your successful man; something servile in the favorite of princes. You remem-

ber how Beethoven reproached Goethe for flunkeyism. The great man should not play flunkey, nor have flunkies about him."

Carlyle looked at me. "Ye're a born rebel," he said, as if astonished, "but there's some truth in what ye say. Goethe was a master of realities, and perhaps paid too much attention to them. But I owed him a great deal, the wide-eyed one: he saw everything, accepted everything, conquered everything—a victorious Bringer of the Light: our modern Prometheus."

"Prometheus suffered a martyrdom," I cried; "the light came from his own agony: this man got podgy fat. He was a real thinker, of course, a great man; but he was too pompous and self-admiring to be a hero. He might have stood on his own feet outside the feudal castle; but he climbed up the wall with strain of hands and toes and sat there contentedly; while Heine—well, you know what Heine did to the feudal wall," and I laughed irreverently.

"Heine!" cried Carlyle, stopping abruptly in his walk: "Heine was a dirty Jew pig!"

I had been very nervous with Carlyle at first. I admired him to reverence, and when he said things that seemed to me all wrong, or even absurd, I simply held my tongue. But little by little I had grown to know him better: I became impatient now when he repeated pages of his own writings, or said things that were manifestly false. I wanted to get

to the end of his thought, to win new, deep words from him. I had also begun to feel that on some subjects we were infinities apart and must always think differently, and now he had outraged a cult that was almost a religion to me: I threw restraint to the winds and spoke as I felt.

"Heine," I burst out, "Heine was the first of the moderns; one of the divine; a master of wit and poetry; a lord of laughter and of tears."

"A dirty Jew pig!" He repeated the words as if speaking impersonally: he loved argument as only a Scot can love it.

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"He was animal, dirty," repeated Carlyle, and I remarked his long, obstinate upper lip.

"Dirty as you and I and all men are dirty," I replied: "you remember the French proverb—*bon animal, bon homme?*"

"Your French are dirty, too," he persisted, "but not I nor all men."

"What does dirty mean?" I exclaimed impatiently. "Shakespeare was dirty, if you like; but on his forehead climb the crowns of the world."

Carlyle shook his head, and I retorted obstinately: "What about the Nurse, and Mercutio, Hamlet, Portia and the 'dark lady' of the sonnets, false Cressida and Cleopatra, Goneril, Regan, and a dozen others—all dirty, as you call it? Art knows nothing of dirt. You might as well talk of a quad-

ratic equation as improper. And how you, with your humor, can speak as you do of Heine stumps me. You of all men must appreciate Heine's humor; now impish, now deep-sighted, kindly, irresistible."

"He had humor," Carlyle admitted at once, "and that's a wonderful gift, humor—a saving grace. . . . Curious," he went on after a pause, "that none of the old Jewish writers or prophets had any of it; they were all serious, too serious. Where did Heine get his humor? . . . There must have been some German blood in him somewhere; the Germans have humor, Richter plenty of it, and of the finest."

"You need not go beyond the Jews to find humor," I replied. "The Stock Exchanges of Europe are hot-beds of it; humorous stories and phrases abound there, and the Exchanges are the New Jerusalems. The chosen people have a keen sense of humor."

"Curious," he said again, "very curious. But Heine was dirty-minded."

"He was a Socialist and singer," I cried, "modern and irreverent to his finger-tips; a brave soldier in the Liberation War of humanity."

"I doubt but ye're a rebel yerself," said Carlyle, looking down at me with quizzical humor in his eyes, "a born rebel."

"It hurts," I said, a little confused, "to hear you

running down Heine; for you have always fought on the same side, though not with the same weapons."

"It may be," he replied; "but I dislike the lechery of him, the dirty ape!"

I saw it was no use arguing. I was up against a wall of separation, a fundamental difference of nature. I left the matter to be thought over at my leisure. It seemed to me I had hit upon a shortcoming of Carlyle.

During his lifetime there was a general impression that Carlyle, if not a Christian, was at least profoundly religious in the Christian sense of the word. He had been nurtured, so to speak, on the Bible: as soon as he was deeply moved, Biblical phrases came to his lips, and one was apt therefore to attribute to him a measure of faith altogether foreign to his thought. Much of the profound sadness in him came, I think, from his utter disbelief: a reverent soul brought up in childlike piety, he had sought desperately for some sign of God, some trace of a purpose in life, some hint, however vague, of a goal however distant, and had found nothing. His mind, tuned to practical realities, trained to mathematical demonstrations, would accept no half-proof, and rejected with scorn the fancy that the soul's desire was in itself an earnest of fulfilment. Gradually he settled down in Goethe's phrase to resolute acceptance of the True

and the Good for their own sake; but his heart felt starved and lonely, and as his mind outgrew the ordinary prejudices and opinions of men he inevitably became more and more solitary-sad.

Our talk fell on Shakespeare, I don't know why.

"In *Heroes and Hero-Worship*," I questioned, "you say that Shakespeare is the greatest man who has ever shown himself in literature. That seems to imply that greater men have shown themselves elsewhere?"

"I don't think I meant that," he replied, "though it is a little difficult to compare a great man of action with a great man of letters: I am not sure that the literary genius is the wider or deeper, though most men seem to believe it is."

"Do you think Shakespeare greater than Jesus?" I asked.

"Indeed I do," was the emphatic reply; "and so do you." I shook my head, but he persisted. "What do we know of Jesus? just naething. Learned people tell us that all the best phrases put in His mouth were old sayings of Jewish sages, and the testimony of the gospels is of the weakest—altaegither untrustworthy."

"I do not want any testimony," I cried. "The best sayings of Jesus all belong to one mind, a mind of the very rarest. Greatness is its own proof. No two Jews were ever born who could have said,

'Suffer little children to come unto me . . .' or 'Much shall be forgiven her for she loved much.' "

"Humph," he grunted. "I prefer Shakespeare; he was larger, richer."

"Perhaps," I replied; "but Jesus went deeper."

"I don't admit it," he persisted. "All that Jewish morality was tribal, narrow; 'an eye for an eye,' stupid, pedantic formula; and the Christian—'turn the other cheek'—mere absurdity. I see no greatness in any of it."

" 'He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone,' " I replied, "is great enough and modern to boot," but he would not let me continue; he had got the decisive argument clear at last.

"Man, He had no humor," he cried, shaking his head; "Jesus had no Falstaff in him; I wad na gie up the ragged company for all the disciples," and again the deep-set eyes danced.

I tried to put forward some other reasons, but he would not listen; he repeated obstinately, "He had no Falstaff in him, no Falstaff . . ." and he chuckled.

The subject was closed; but the argument had shown me how far Carlyle's disbelief had carried him—in pendulum swing, beyond the centre.

I took up a new subject which I had often wanted to get his opinion on. How was I to broach it? I made a little cast round like an eager huntsman.

"You must have met all the distinguished men of

the age, Mr. Carlyle?" I began. "Dozens of great men. Who was the greatest?"

"Emerson," he replied at once, "Emerson by far, and the noblest . . ." and he nodded his head, repeating the name with a sort of reminiscent emotion.

"Greater than Darwin?" I cried in wonder. "But perhaps you didn't know Darwin?"

"Indeed, and I knew him well," he replied, taking me up shortly, "knew him long ago, long before he was so famous, knew him and his brother. I always thought the brother the abler of the two—quicker and of wider range; but both were solid, healthy men, not greatly gifted, but honest and careful and hardworking. . . . I remember when he came back after the *Beagle* cruise. I met him at Lady ——'s, a great party, and all the ladies buzzed about him like bees round a dish of sugar. When he had had enough of it—perhaps more than was good for him—I called him.

" 'Come here, Charles,' I cried, 'and explain to me this new theory of yours that all the world's talking about.'

"He came at once and sat down with me, and talked most modestly and sensibly about it all. I saw in him then qualities I had hardly done justice to before: a patient clear-mindedness, fairness too, and, above all, an allegiance to facts, just as facts, which was most pathetic to me; it was so instinctive, determined, even desperate, a sort of belief in its

way, an English belief, that the facts must lead you right if you only followed them honestly, a poor groping, blind faith—all that seems possible to us in these days of flatulent unbelief and piggish unconcern for everything except swill and straw," and the eyes gleamed wrathfully under the bushy-grey brows.

"That must have been wonderful," I resumed after a pause, "to have heard Darwin explain Darwinism."

"He did it very well," Carlyle went on, "an ordered lucidity in him which showed me I had underrated him, misseen him, as we poor purblind mortals are apt to missee each other even with the best will in the world to see fairly," and he sighed again heavily.

"But the theory must have interested you," I said, hoping to excite him to say more.

"Ay," he said, as if plunged in thought and then waking up. "The theory, man! the theory is as old as the everlasting hills," impatient contempt in his voice. "There's nothing in it—nothing; it leads no whither—all sound and fury signifying naething, naething. . . .

"The fittest," he went on with unspeakable scorn, "'the survival of the fittest'; there's an answer for you to make a soul sick. What is your 'fittest,' what d'ye mean by't? An evasion I call it, a cowardly, sneaking evasion, with its tail between its legs. Is

your 'fittest' the best, the noblest, the most unselfish? There's a faith, a belief to live and die by; but is that your 'fittest,' eh? Answer me that. That's what concerns me, a man—that and nothing else.

"Or is your 'fittest' a poor servile two-legged spaniel sneaking round for bones and fawning on his master, beslobbering his feet? Or just the greedier mediocrity among hosts of mediocrities, the slightly stronger pig or fox, eh? *Ay di me, ay di me*—the evil dreams! 'Fittest,' humph!" and he pursed his lips and blinked his eyes to get rid of the unshed tears.

"Did you tell Darwin what you thought of his new scientific creed?" I asked after a pause.

"I did," he said, with a quick change of mood, smiling suddenly with the gay sunshiny, irresistible smile that illumined his whole face, quivering on the lips, dancing in the eyes, wrinkling the nose.

"After Darwin had talked to me for some time a little crowd had gathered about us, open-mouthed, listening to Sir Oracle, and when he had finished I said:

" 'All that's very interesting, Darwin, no doubt; how we men were evolved from apes and all that, and perhaps true,' and I looked about me at the listeners. 'I see no reason to doubt it, none; but what I want to know is how we're to prevent this present generation from devolving into apes? That

seems to me the important matter—to prevent them devolving into apes.' "

And the old man laughed—a great belly-shaking laugh that shook him into a cough, and there we stood laughing, laughing in harmony at length with the sun which shone bravely overhead, while the silken wavelets danced with joy and the air was young and quick.

Carlyle's Mission

It is time now to consider what Carlyle's talent really was and what his gift to men. He has left us in no doubt as to what he thought his qualities and their proper field. When he was asked to lecture in London he chose *Heroes and Hero-Worship* as his subject; and the book still stands as perhaps his most characteristic performance. His *Cromwell* is the typical example of his own hero-worship. It will be remembered that he chose Frederick the Great to write about a little reluctantly, because Frederick, he said, was only half a hero; he was not devout enough, not persuaded enough in his faith; but Carlyle chose him nevertheless because he was a "practical hero," the best leader of men whom that poor eighteenth century could produce.

His *Past and Present* and *Latter-day Pamphlets* give us his view of the politics of his own time. If ever a man believed he was a born leader of men, it

was Carlyle; born to rule in England, to abolish the anarchy of Parliamentary misgovernment, to endow England with modern institutions instead of feudal institutions, to found an industrial State in place of a chivalrous-Christian anarchy. Not "arms and the man" was to be the burden of the new epic, but "tools and the man." Now, instead of dismissing this incommensurate ambition with cheap ridicule, let us see in what relation Carlyle stood to his time, and then we may be able to judge whether he was deceived or not in his self-estimate.

Towards the end of 1908 a book appeared—*The Making of Carlyle.* The title is a little pretentious; but the book is not a bad book—a good book, indeed, so far as it goes; though Mr. Craig, the author, lends Carlyle his own errors. For example, he declares that "Socialism is only a contradiction of open competition; the sole difference is one of label; slavery is the sure mark of both."

I venture to think that Mr. Craig is mistaken in this; certainly he is mistaken in giving this as Carlyle's view. I do not remember a single passage in Carlyle's writings where socialism is condemned as resembling open competition in being a form of slavery. As a matter of fact, Carlyle did not condemn "slavery": what he condemned and ridiculed was "the freedom of the wild jackass," as he called it; the liberty of men to starve masterless.

Carlyle was not the first to see this side of the

truth. Goethe and Coleridge both had insisted that unrestrained individual liberty must lead to the worst slavery.

"The open secret" (*das offene Geheimniss*) of Goethe, which Carlyle refers to over and over again in *Past and Present* and *Latter-day Pamphlets,* is simply the axiom of Hegel that every virtue pushed to an extreme results in a vice which is the exact opposite of the virtue. Open competition for the means of livelihood must result in the despotism of the few and the absolute enslavement of the many. No worse tyranny has been recorded in modern times than that which was to be seen in England in the generation after Waterloo, from 1815 to 1830, when the manufacturer was establishing his awful pre-eminence. Thousands of children were hired in Devonshire and Cornwall, and driven across the country in gangs like cattle to the Lancashire factories, where they were worked to death for the enrichment of the manufacturers. The commission of doctors which "the noble Ashley," as Carlyle called him, got appointed, declared that the first effective Factory Act of 1833 "was an Act to prevent child murder." Carlyle, too, sneered at the Parliament which decreed that able-bodied negroes in the West Indies should not work more than forty-five hours a week, though allowing English children under thirteen years of age to be worked fifty-six hours a week.

While our so-called statesmen were going about declaiming odes to "liberty," Carlyle saw the evils of unrestricted liberty, and predicted a speedy and not an honorable end to what he knew was mere anarchy with a fine name.

Carlyle did not set limits to socialism, or State and municipal enterprise, did not say how far socialism should enter into our industrial life and where it must stop, though his master Goethe had done this [1]; but he felt that there was a place for both socialism and individualism in modern civilization, and it is to his credit that he never made one statement on the matter that was false or mistaken. Ruskin, his pupil, made hundreds of mistakes, as when he set Oxford students to build a useless road across a swamp; but Carlyle did not blunder or mislead.

The truth is he brought morals as a certain test into economics. He declared that the employer of labor who simply worked for his own hand and for his own enrichment was a mere buccaneer and not a true captain of industry, and thus put his finger on the sore. It was his reliance on the moral

[1] In his dramatic fragment *Prometheus,* Epimetheus asks:

"What then is yours?"

And the answer of Prometheus is a notable example of Goethe's insight:

"The sphere that my activity can fill!
No more, no less!"

instincts which gave him his unique authority. Goethe's praise of him was curiously right—"a moral force of incalculable importance." Let us now consider his practical proposals and see how time has treated his pretensions.

The Empire-Builder and Reformer

Seventy years ago Carlyle saw more clearly than our Parliamentary people of either party see to-day. Seventy years ago he proposed to take our surplus population in British warships and settle them on the waste lands of the Canadian North-West and the waste lands of South Africa and Australia—a genial Empire-building idea, if ever there was one, which would have settled up the Canadian North-West instead of allowing free-trade or free-chance to settle up the American North-West. Had Carlyle's advice been followed we should have had thirty or forty millions of Englishmen by now in Canada instead of five millions, and five or six or ten millions of Englishmen in South Africa instead of a few hundred thousands. There would have been no Boer war if Carlyle's insight had been used sixty or seventy years ago. The only thing that saved us in the Boer war was the fact that the Cape Dutch didn't join their kinsmen across the Vaal, and Cape Colony was kept quiet by the little band of English settlers who were planted somewhat after

Carlyle's plan in the Eastern Province sixty or seventy years ago; nothing else, it is said, nothing but that stood between us and irremediable defeat.

There would be no competition between us and Germany to-day had Carlyle been a ruler in England; for our Empire instead of counting some fifty millions of Englishmen would now count more than one hundred millions. He was the first and greatest Imperialist, just as he was the wisest social reformer.

It was Carlyle who made men realize that the "condition-of-England" was the question of questions to-day; he was the first to point out that till we had drained the foul quagmire of poverty no high civilization would be possible to us. And Carlyle saw plainly enough that the quagmire could only be drained by giving the land of England back to the people of England. That was the first reform, he said; all other necessary measures would follow in its train. But the quagmire is still there—undrained, larger and deeper now, and with worse effect on the public health—all just as he predicted. And the dead cat of Parliamentary debate still washes back and forth on every tide in front of Westminster, and is daily growing more offensive to the sense. The wisest governor and bravest soul born in England since Cromwell was left to fret his heart out in obscurity as a writer in a back street

while England muddled on into ever increasing difficulties—the blind leading the blind.

There is a memorable page in his *Life of Sterling* which gives the furthest reach of his insight on practical social reform. He saw that the "intellectuals" to-day were suffering as much as the "hands." Our four professions—the Church, Medicine, Law, and the Army and Navy—he remarks, were all professions in the Middle Ages. In spite of the fact that modern life has grown ten times more complex, we have hardly attempted to organize any of the new sciences or arts, or "regiment" their teachers in efficient bodies. Consequently, the new intellectual workers are all at a disadvantage and suffer under an inferiority due to the negligence of our rulers. In the same way he might have gone on to point out that three-fourths of all the schools to-day in England for higher education were there in the days of Elizabeth, and draw the obvious moral.

When I knew Carlyle in 1877-9 I tried more than once to get on this subject. I wanted to know why he had not taken the conventional road to power, why he had never stood for Parliament? I woke the old lion up, but could get no answer save a contemptuous sniff. When I pressed him again later he told me he had not had the time and money to waste. I returned again and again to the charge. "You wanted to show your insight as a ruler," I said in effect, "and perhaps because that was your true

métier you underrated your own literary skill and every one else's."

"I have none," he ejaculated.

"That is delightful nonsense," I retorted, "the first chapter of your *French Revolution* is one of the finest pictures ever painted in words, and painted deliberately with conscious artistry: chance has no such achievement."

"Painted truthfully," he corrected, "and not artistically at all, unless truth and cunning are one—as perhaps they are," he added as if to himself.

"And because you see that this contest with poverty is the chief problem of the day, you think little of your pictures, even of Cromwell or of Frederick," I persisted.

"Ah!" he replied, "Cromwell would have taken the problem in hand. If Cromwell had had the East End before him he would have drained the swamp—Greatheart, I call him."

I got nothing from him but such glimpses of truth till I spoke once of Disraeli.

"Curious," I said, "that he was more in sympathy with you than Gladstone. He at least offered you a baronetcy. Why didn't you take it?"

"Baronetcy!" the old man barked. "The unspeakable Jew would have given me the reward of work, but not the work: he might have kept the reward if he had given me the work." And he rose to his feet. "Then I should have had some-

thing better to do than write words, words, words for fools to read who don't even know what you mean, who never will know. A baronetcy to me! Why not a silk sash and a garter! I was an old man before Disraeli even knew that I was alive, and what I might have done! It hardly bears thinking of . . ." and he turned away.

"There was Froude now: they gave him a chance in South Africa, and he did pretty well, I believe. Honest, kindly Froude; but they never gave me a chance. Sometimes I wonder why? I would have done what one man could. But I had to write instead, and I wasn't made to write; I was made to guide, perhaps, and direct; I might have done things: who knows? It was not to be, I suppose. . . ."

Carlyle was right, I verily believe—"it hardly bears thinking of." That England should have left a finer intelligence than Burke, a greater force than Chatham, to rust unused for fifty years; the best reforming brain of two centuries unemployed, hardly bears thinking of. The English are suffering from not having used him, and are likely to suffer for many a long year to come. England does not even trouble to stone the prophets; she shrugs her broad shoulders, and when they speak too loudly puts them out of doors or stuffs her fingers in her ears. Germany used Bismarck and England did not use Carlyle, though he was a greater reformer and ruler.

That difference may have tremendous consequences one day.

To sum it all up, Carlyle's gift to men was in essence astonishingly simple: he was the best product of English puritanism of whom we have any knowledge. All that that belief had in it of honesty and sincerity, of single-hearted allegiance to what was true and right and just, came to fruit in Thomas Carlyle.

"All great thoughts come from the heart," wrote Vauvenargues, and in exactly the same spirit Carlyle used the heart or, as he would have said, his highest instincts as the supreme guide in human affairs. And there is certainly no better guide.

It was this honesty and sincerity which gave Carlyle his solitary and singular literary triumph. The clever, adroit, able man practically concerned with his own rewards and his own successes, the "hero" of the school of Hume and other such historians, was abhorrent to Carlyle. All great men, he felt, were absolutely in earnest, sincere to the soul, filled with the spirit which urges man to ever higher accomplishment. No Mahomet, no Cromwell, no Goethe is thinkable without this elemental force. All Carlyle's heroes were *seers* like the prophets of old, men who had a vision of the truth; men through whom, as he phrased it, God Himself had spoken. And so he taught a fat, smug grocer-folk what heroes were and how useful they were (if we must

measure stars by their candle-power) and he showed a crowd that admired Crystal Palaces what a true temple was like, a temple not made with hands—eternal in the heavens. Carlyle was, indeed, a moral force of incalculable value.

His literary power all comes from his practical insight into facts and his astounding knowledge of men. He has left us a splendid gallery of realistic portrait-sketches. Who that glances at them can ever forget his Frederick, or his Mirabeau, or his Robespierre, or, for that matter, Mme. Roland, or Marat, or Danton, or a hundred other inimitable photographs pinned to life, so to speak, by touches of humorous exaggeration.

The Puritan's Limitations

On all the main issues, then, of modern politics the great Puritan was in the right; his insight has been justified by the event: he was at once the best guiding and governing force ever seen in England. We must now try to realize his limitations and shortcomings. Strange to say, he was typical of Puritanism also in this; his blind side was the blind side of the whole movement, and supplies the reason why the movement failed to satisfy modern needs and why it is that to-day Puritanism is universally discredited.

Carlyle had hardly any sense of sex or stirring

of passion. He was even more devoid of bodily desire than Swift or Ruskin. This lack brought him to misery and his life to wreck. Mr. Craig points out that he never shared his wife's natural longing for children; he could not even understand it. He had not enough sensuality to comprehend his wife's ordinary needs and so he treated her harshly without realizing his own blindness till it was too late even for atonement.

A passage in his *Heroes and Hero-Worship* first put me on the track. Speaking of Dante he admitted that the great Florentine was "gey ill to live with" and nevertheless, defended him. Men like Dante, he says, of keen passionate sensibilities, and conscious of the importance of their mission must always be difficult to live with. It was as if Carlyle had been justifying his own conduct.

One day we were walking together in Hyde Park: as we neared Hyde Park Corner it began to rain: naturally, I quickened my pace a little. Suddenly, to my utter astonishment, Carlyle stopped, and taking off his soft hat stood there in the rain with his grey head bowed. For a moment I was lost in wonder: then I remembered his picture of old Dr. Johnson standing bareheaded before his father's shop in Lichfield half in piety, half in remorse. I guessed that Carlyle was thinking of his wife, and then it flashed across me that it was here in Hyde Park she had died in her carriage while he was in

Edinburgh. When he put on his hat and walked on, the tears were running down his face.

I can't remember how the talk began and my notes do not help me much. At the time I put down simply: "Johnson's penance and piety; remorse and repentance not good, harmful; Carlyle's excessive. Bit by bit he told the incredible story."

In brief the story was that he admired his wife beyond all other women, loved her and her alone all his life; but had never consummated the marriage or lived with her as a wife.

"The body part seemed so little to me," he pleaded: "I had no idea it could mean much to her. I should have thought it degrading her to imagine that. *Ay di me, ay di me.* . . . Quarter of a century passed before I found out how wrong I was, how mistaken, how criminally blind. . . . It was the doctor told me, and then it was too late for anything but repentance. My poor love! She had never told me anything; never even hinted anything; was too proud, and I, blind, blind. . . . When I blamed myself to her I saw the doctor was right; she had suffered and I—ah God, how blind we mortals can be; how blind!

"It was as if I had been operated for cataract and sight had been given me suddenly. I saw the meaning of a hundred things which had passed me unexplained; I loved her so that I realized even wishes unconfessed to herself, realized that she

would have been happier married to Irving, and that she had felt this. Speaking once of his pretended gift of tongues, she said 'he would have had no such gift had I married him.' I understood, at length, that she had wanted him. Physically he was splendid, and she had felt his attraction. . . . I loved her so, I could have given her to him, and I did nothing but injure her and maim her life, the darling! who did everything for me and was everything to me for forty years. . . .

"And the worst of it all is, there is no other life in which to atone to her—my puir girlie! it's done, and God himself cannot undo it. My girl, my puir girl! . . . Man, man, it's awful, awful to hurt your dearest blindly, awful!" and the tears rained down the haggard old face and the eyes stared out in utter misery.

I comforted him as best I could, told him that in his remorse he exaggerated the wrong and the injury, that, after all, he had been by far the best husband Mrs. Carlyle could have had, that faithlessness went with passion, that she might have suffered more with any other man, and that she could never have known with any other such perfect companionship of spirit, such intimacy of soul, but he shook his head; he had always loved the truth and now against himself he would not blink it. "Ma puir girlie!" was his cry and "blind, blind!" his ceaseless

self-reproach. He had put all his pride in his insight, and it was his insight that had failed him.

Years later I told the fact at a dinner at the Garrick Club, and a man I did not then know confirmed it across the table; told me he was the doctor in question and afterwards in private gave me the other side of the story from what Mrs. Carlyle had told him. It was Sir Richard Quayne,[1] I believe. Some time or other I shall probably tell what he told me that night.

Carlyle's confession to me broke down all barriers between us. Whenever we met afterwards he treated me with infinite consideration and kindness. But all that is another story, and not to be told here.

What concerns us now is the fact that this bodily disability of Carlyle explains most of his shortcomings as literary critic and writer, and in especial his blindness to what one might call the æsthetic side of life. His eyes and heart were closed to beauty; he never saw that House Beautiful of Art which today occupies the place in life formerly held by church and conventicle. He had nothing but contempt for

[1] The name in my memory is "Dicky Quain"; but I only noted "the doctor" and one letter after it which is illegible. I have since been enabled to date this dinner in 1887 and to corroborate the chief particulars of my account by the memory of my host that evening, Sir Charles Jessel.

poetry; "jingles" he called it; would never admit its high significance. Pictures, too, except of real events, he took little interest in, and studies of the nude human figure seemed to him indecent and disgraceful: he had no ear for music or understanding of its universal passionate appeal. Had he been given despotic power this is where he must have failed; he would have starved the senses and neglected their dramatic and vital uses.

The curious part of the matter is that though he saw clearly, perhaps all too vividly, how his shortcoming had led him astray in the most intimate personal relation, he never seemed to suspect that the same physical disability must necessarily blind him to the artistic side of life and make him an absurd judge of its value and importance. Hence arose all or nearly all his weird literary misjudgings. He said of Wordsworth:

"A small genuine man; nothing perhaps is sadder than the *unbounded* laudation of such a man."

Keats to him was a "dead jackass perfumed with rose-water." He even went so far as to declare to me once that nothing but brains, sheer insight counted, and that Shakespeare's brains, apart from his poetic and literary gift, were no better than his own. I ventured on this matter pointedly to disagree with him. It seems to me that Shakespeare and Bacon, too, have shown better brains.

After all the tree is judged by its fruits and the writer by his works: whatever virtues he possesses and whatever failings will certainly be found there for all men to see. And it must be admitted, I'm afraid, that Carlyle's works are not at all commensurate with his genius, and represent but poorly the fifty years of unremitting toil he put into them. His slightest writings are the most read, and the most readable—the *Cromwell, Heroes and Hero-Worship, Sartor Resartus,* and *The French Revolution.* His most ambitious work, *The Life of Frederick,* is a colossal failure: he has buried his hero under the monument he built in memory of him. Had his relations to life been happier he must have known that no story without love in it could possibly hold the interest of men for a dozen volumes. As it is, the gold of a noble spirit is all dispersed and lost in the gigantic earth-heap of a mole-like industry.

If he had devoted the eleven years wasted on his Frederick to the story of *Carlyle and his Contemporaries,* if he had used his superb gift of realistic portraiture on the men and women whom he knew personally, he would surely, I believe, have given us a dozen pages for our English Bible. It is not quantity we want, but quality; not information but inspiration. The last chapter of Ecclesiastes, the few verses of Paul on Charity outweigh a library. Carlyle's outlook on life was sombre and sad, never

joyous: his temper desperate or despairing, not hopeful: I find the explanation in his physical weakness which he was accustomed to speak of as merely dyspepsia.

All Carlyle's faults as a man of letters are sins against the spirit of Beauty, and they are all to be found writ large in Puritanism. Puritanism as we know defaced the churches, tore down the images of saints, and shut the theatres. Puritanism it was that destroyed the gallery of paintings which had been collected by Charles I, and ordered that "all pictures containing any representation of the Second person of Trinity or of the Virgin" should be "forthwith burnt."

Carlyle's impotence made everything about him clear to me. Ever afterwards I saw him as a sort of Polyphemus, a one-eyed giant. He stood to me for Puritanism itself and explained it, in its strength and in its fatal weakness, as no one else could. Paganism died because it neglected the soul, and the claims of the soul; Puritanism died because it scorned the body and the claims of the body.

But it was honest and sincere even when it went in blinkers, and intensely in earnest, and in England it produced two great men as witnesses to its virtue, Cromwell and Carlyle. England used Cromwell, but did not use Carlyle, yet in spite of his physical disability Carlyle was greater than the ruler whom

Milton called "our chief of men" and by reason of his bodily disability he was the more perfect representative of English Puritanism.

"Gross beginnet, ihr Titanen; aber leiten
Zu dem ewig Guten, ewig Schönen,
Ist der Götter Werk; die lasst gewähren!"

RENAN

IT was in 1889 or 1890 that the late Sir Charles Dilke gave me a letter to Renan. "You should call on him in the Collège de France," he said; "he talks wonderfully; if he takes to you, you'll have a treat."

I sent the letter of introduction with a note, and called on Renan a day or two afterwards by appointment. I was shown into a very ordinary room, a room of the French middle class, and in a moment or two Renan entered. He was very amiable; it was kind of me to come, he said: would I not sit down and take coffee; Sir Charles Dilke was one of the politicians whom he most esteemed; his intimate knowledge of France and his liking for things French seemed to promise a more cordial understanding between the two peoples. . . . While he talked fluent amiabilities of this sort, I tried to take a mental photograph of him.

Renan was a short man, not more than five feet three or four in height and very stout. Fat had swamped all the outlines of his face except the forehead, which appeared narrow in comparison with the large jaws and porky jowl. Yet looked at by

itself the forehead was not narrow, of fair size indeed and shapely, and the eyes, which at first seemed small and watchful, were more usually intent and a little sad, as of one who had had his share of life's disappointments and disillusions. The nose was of good form, but thick and fleshy, suiting the face. The mouth was a better feature; a little small, the upper lip firm, the lower sensitive and sinuous—the mouth of a born orator and artist. The voice was more than worthy of the lips, a sweet clear tenor, pleasant and supple, with a myriad graceful inflections in it and significant pauses—the soul of the man to me was in his charming, light, flexible voice.

As Renan sat on the edge of the chair, his pear-shaped stomach appeared to keep his short legs apart; he had a trick of planting his hands palm downwards on his stout thighs, or of interlacing his fingers across his paunch, while twirling his thumbs. His nails were ill-kept, and the front of his frock-coat had grease stains on it; his hair, worn in long locks and fringing his collar behind, was dirty grey in color, and looked untidy.

Altogether he was the very type of a French village priest: easy-going and good-natured, careless of cleanliness and neatness as if lax conduct had been further relaxed by years of self-indulgence. Nothing distinguished in his appearance; nothing beyond fair intelligence and much patience in the

brooding regard; hardly a trace of will-power to be found; but plenty of fat kindness and ample tolerance, and a shrewd reading of facts and men with the searching, intent eyes.

His talk that first afternoon was not remarkable: fluent and graceful with here and there a touch of irony curving the fine lips to a smile. He seemed rather to evade knotty points, to wish to keep in the shallows of ordinary social intercourse. Behind his smiling amiability I divined a colossal conceit quick to suspect and resent any lack of reverence. I paid him compliments, therefore; praised his *Life of Jesus,* his *Dialogues,* and even his plays effusively. He lapped it all up with smiling satisfaction: evidently he had been very well treated in life, this priest who had turned worship into one of the graceful arts.

I made my visit short. At first he had seemed a little on his guard, but at the end of our talk he showed himself most kindly, amiable. My praise must have been grateful to him, for he pressed me to come again: he would always be delighted to see me, he repeated.

. . . . . .

A little later I called on him again and heard all about his travels in Palestine. He insisted on the obvious fact that topographical knowledge is of the utmost importance to the historian.

"When you see the Plain of Gennesaret, or the

Lake of Galilee or Jerusalem," he said, "your understanding of the events and of the personages is enormously vivified and quickened: the *milieu* explains the man much as the soil explains the tree. The best part of my *Life of Jesus* was prepared in Palestine. It was there Jesus became completely comprehensible to me."

In spite of myself I smiled a little at this flattering self-estimate, but outwardly I was quite polite, and followed his lead by saying that Carlyle had told me the same thing; he had gone to Dunbar before writing the history of the battle; Curtius, too, always declared his history of Greece was inspired by his travels in the peninsula.

Renan was interested in this, and generalized the experience at once:

"The literary and artistic movement of our day," he said, "is towards realism; the wish to see the thing as it is: everywhere the love of the document, trust in the fact—very interesting."

Sometime after this I happened to mention casually that I was going to see Renan, when an American acquaintance asked me whether it would be possible to introduce him? He assured me he would enjoy it above everything. I knew him only slightly, but he seemed so eager about it that I took his desire for half-proof of sympathy and understanding, and accordingly wrote to Renan that I would call on him on a certain day, and, if he would allow me,

present a friend who much wished to know him. We called; Renan was cordial and charming, but the American turned out to be a terror. Again and again he tried to impress Renan with the fact that life in Paris was exceedingly immoral, that incidents took place there every day which would not be tolerated in an Anglo-Saxon town. Renan smiled, and listened politely for some little time; but at length his patience was exhausted; looking up at him under his grey brows, and evidently taking him for an Englishman, he asked in his silkiest voice:

"Have you ever seen anything in Paris, Monsieur, more immoral than a leader in *The Times?*"

"What does he mean?" the American asked me in English. "There can be nothing immoral in a leading article in *The Times.*"

"Oh yes, there can be," I gasped, "and there often is, and the American newspaper is just as immoral as the English."

After this I cut the interview as short as possible and ended it with the most flattering things I could say to Renan. I told him how I admired his celebrated letter to Berthelot and how right it was that the first artist in creative criticism should write to the first master of synthetic chemistry on such a subject as the life of Christ.

A day or two afterwards I called again to apologize to Renan for having introduced my compatriot. I found he had understood everything. He

had seen that the American did not mean to be rude, and he was desirous of explaining to me that he had not wished to reprove him, but just to induce him to think of the shortcomings of his own race.

"It is the rudeness," Renan continued, "of Germans and Englishmen that always astonishes us Frenchmen. They are rude unconsciously; it is not a rudeness of self-absorption or of excitement—that we could easily pardon; but the rudeness of a lower plane of thought and feeling, the rudeness of selfishness or want of consideration. . . .

"I sometimes think that it takes a civilization of thousands of years to make a nation polite. When you tell a Frenchman that he is impolite he is shocked, he insists on your proving it. Even when he is most angry he understands that it is a grave delinquency. But I am informed that if you tell an angry Englishman or an American that he is impolite, he simply laughs at you; it would not seem to him a disgraceful charge at all. He sees nothing in impoliteness, and therefore does not resent the accusation. . . .

"Your English civilization is too young; it is only four or five centuries old, and the German civilization in the sense of national life is shorter even than yours. Our civilization, on the other hand, goes back to Roman times; we have been civilized for two thousand years, and the Italians, whose civilization is still older than ours, are still more exquisitely

polite than we are. We Latin people have a great inheritance," he concluded, pursing his lips; "we ought therefore to be very considerate of others. . . ."

I remembered something Matthew Arnold had written once on this subject, and I told him of it. Arnold classed English and French civilizations together, saying that in literature and art they have the same canons, the same understanding of high artistic work, the same keen feeling for faults and shortcomings, even in masterpieces; because they both possess an old and rich national life: they have a long rule wherewith to measure.

"It is no doubt conceit," I added, "that made Matthew Arnold assume that our language goes back to Beowulf, and that English civilization dates from the landing of Augustine in the sixth century."

Renan was quick to take it that I was putting forward my disagreement with him under the shield of Matthew Arnold.

"But your language," he said, "surely began with Chaucer about the middle of the fourteenth century?"

"Our Saxon Chronicle is, of course, far earlier," I remarked, "centuries earlier, and there are poems and things before that."

"But can you read them?" he asked.

"They are difficult," I replied, "but I think they

are as easy to read as your oldest poetry written in the Isle de France."

"Really, really," he replied, while apparently seeking for a telling rejoinder. "At any rate you will admit that Rome was the hearth of civilization from which radiated all this pleasant intellectual warmth and light, and we are a little nearer the centre than you are."

"Much, much nearer," I replied politely.

Was it possible I asked myself, as I went away, that the nation of Racine and Pascal and Balzac should think itself superior to the race that had produced Shakespeare and Bacon and Emerson? I could not help smiling a little at Renan's amiable condescension.

. . . . . .

I had seen him many times, talked with him on many matters, become almost an intimate indeed before we grappled finally over *The Life of Jesus*. I must confess that my ideas at first were not very clear on the subject. I admired Renan's book, but took it rather as a romance than a biography. In its own way it was very interesting and worthful, but there seemed to me appalling mistakes in it, misconceptions even, as well as faults of irreverence and impiety which put my back up. No one, I thought, should approach that theme save on his knees. I could not pardon the easy, careless, condescending treatment of the subject. All sorts of men have

handled it, great and small: Rubens and Rembrandt, Velasquez, and Fra Angelico. The best presentations have always been the most reverent: *The Stranger at Emmaus* of Rembrandt, *The Master with Judas* of Fra Angelico.

I did not want to discuss his book with Renan: he had always been particularly courteous and kind to me, and I was afraid I should hurt him. But there was in him an irrepressible curiosity as to the position he and his work held in other countries. He saw, as Bacon saw, that the judgment of other peoples had in it something of the detachment and impartiality necessary to a definitive decision. One day he pressed me to tell him frankly what Englishmen thought of his *Life of Jesus*.

"They don't think of it," I replied laughing, "but," I hastened to add, "there's no class in any country, is there, at all able to judge your work?"

"Perhaps you're right," he rejoined, smiling at the implied compliment, "tell me, will you, what you think of it?"

"Oh, I love it," I replied. "It is a charming and beautiful work of art: the romance of religion."

"I see," he took up the thought gravely; "you think it is too artistic, not true enough, eh? Please be frank with me. It would be the truest kindness."

He used sincere words and I had to respond to them.

"As you insist upon it," I said, "that is some-

thing like my meaning. The Life is written by one more occupied with the idea of painting a complete picture than by a man who is resolved to set down just what he sees, no jot more, no tittle less.

"In face of that world-tragedy I think we English want the actual story with all its gaps, the fragmentary truth and the truth alone with nothing added, rather than a story pieced out by the imagination. We're afraid of a syllable beyond what is implicit in the known facts."

"You must give a concrete instance," he cried. "What you say interests me enormously. Where have I put in patches that swear at the rest of the cloth?"

"Forgive me," I cried; "I did not go so far as that," and then, smiling in deprecation, I went on; for I felt that my frankness had touched him on the quick; "sometimes even when the patch is of the same cloth, I dislike it because it is not the actual garment, and I will not have that added to by any artist in clothes however clever."

"An instance, an instance," he cried, "one instance. You keep me on tenterhooks."

"You will excuse my memory," I stipulated, "if I try to quote you without the book? (He nodded.) Comparing Paul once with Jesus you say, 'he had not his adorable indulgence: his way of excusing everything: his divine inability to see the wrong.

Paul was often imperious and made his authority felt with an assurance that shocks us.'

"Now Jesus may have been of an 'adorable indulgence'; but he did not excuse everything; he was not unable to see the wrong, nor would such inability be generally regarded as divine. Jesus was indulgent to sins of the flesh; but he was very severe on sins of the spirit. 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.' Jesus saw the wrong very clearly and did not excuse it."

"Ah," replied Renan, as if relieved, "you can take a brush-stroke and say it is too heavy, but in comparison with Paul, I maintain that Jesus was of an 'adorable indulgence.' It is all right enough; but each sentence must be looked at as part of a whole."

His happy carelessness, his invincible resolve not to see himself as I saw him, or the faults in his book, as they would be seen by others, challenged me to continue: he would not judge himself though severe self-criticism is the first condition of great work. I answered lightly to be in tune with his manner.

"I do not want to make a point unfairly," I replied. "I chose what I regard as a most characteristic passage. You appear to think that the inability to see the wrong is a divine virtue. I regard that indulgence as merely the amiability of a good-

humored sceptic. But what you have written all hangs together," I broke off, "and forms a whole —a fine French picture of the world-shaking event."

"What do you mean?" he cried, "why do you say a 'French' picture? Do deal frankly with me," he pleaded. "The question interests me greatly; why not treat me as you would wish to be treated?" and he looked at me gravely.

The appeal was irresistible.

"You say that Paul was 'ugly'—'an ugly little Jew,'" I replied; "you use the epithet again and again as a term of reproach. You dwell with pleasure on the personal beauty of Jesus—'a handsome Jewish youth' are your words." (He nodded.) "Well," I went on, "that is another instance of what I mean. We do not know whether Jesus was handsome or not. One feels certain that no one could have lived habitually in communion with the Highest as He did without bearing signs of it in His face. On the other hand, His disciples never speak of His personal beauty, so we must take it that His message was infinitely more important than His looks. A biographer, it seems to me, would have done well to follow their example. The spirit-beauty of Jesus must have been infinitely rarer and more impressive than any regularity of feature."

"You will admit," said Renan, "that the beauty of feature must add to the spirit-beauty, and the weight of evidence is on my side."

He then went on to talk of the various traditions of the Greek and Roman churches with what seemed to me great learning. He discussed the question with such a wealth of special knowledge, that the same evening I could not recall a tenth part of what he had said, and he summed it all up by declaring that whatever evidence there was, seemed to him to favor the idea that Jesus was personally handsome.

His argument left me unconvinced. The Silenus ugliness of Socrates always appeared to me to increase the effect of that death-scene in the Phaedo, while the emphasis laid upon the personal beauty of Mahomet seems to show that his influence was rather one of personality than of spirit.

"Why should we even ask ourselves what Jesus was like?" I questioned. "What he said was so ineffably beautiful that we assume everything else was in harmony with it."

Renan was just as obstinate. "We must agree to disagree on that matter," he said shortly, "but if that is your chief objection to my *Life of Jesus* I am delighted, for you admit that in the main the book is very interesting."

Renan's longing for praise seemed to me almost childish. What can praise or blame matter to one who knows he has done the work? His cawing like a hungry baby-rook for a morsel of praise, stiffened me.

"Oh, no," I said, "it is not my chief objection;

it is only one small instance of what my chief objection is. The main thing is I would not have the story added to or improved even, in any way."

"But you would round his life to completeness?" Renan said, "fill up the gaps in the story?"

"If the facts are implicit in the story," I said, "but not otherwise. I would not use my own imagination at all."

"I do not quite follow you," he replied. "You would not have one merely rewrite the story set forth in the Gospels? Besides, they contradict one another again and again on essential points. You have to use your judgment, your sympathy, your imagination even, when deciding between flagrant contradictions."

"Certainly," I admitted, not wishing to give away my whole thought, "that is only reasonable. What I mean is that the divine figure is there in the Gospels: at least it seems so to me. It may be relieved out from the encumbering dross by judgment and sympathy; but should not be altered."

"But in what way have I altered it?" he cried impatiently.

"Just as you have made Him beautiful," I replied, "so you have made Him heroic. He is the saint to me and not the hero; in Gethsemane He prays that the cup may pass from Him and yet *not My will but Thine be done.* He is the conscience and not the courage of humanity, or, to put it in modern

terms, the impulse of the plant upwards to the light, and not the struggle of the plant with other plants to live."

Renan dismissed my objections as insignificant.

"All great men have something of the hero in them, and so had Jesus in spite of his self-abnegation. It is like the question of His handsome person. He went up to Jerusalem though He must have known what would happen to Him; He dared death then as He endured it later—heroically.

"But of course all these are small matters. The important point is, have I understood the miracles aright? Was he self-deceived in regard to them, or did he deceive others? His character must suffer in the one case, His wisdom in the other.

"I have shown, I think, that it was the people about him who desired the miracles. He did not like wonders; refused indeed to give His enemies any sign, and appears only to have yielded to the desire of the disciples now and then, and with reluctance. Again and again He requests those He has healed to keep His work secret, to tell no one. I hope you agree with me in this view that He only became a wonder-worker late in life, and against His own inclination."

"I am prepared to go further," I confessed, "though I am at least as sceptical as you are about so-called miracles. I feel certain that He healed the sick again and again: that virtue went out of Him and

was felt by those who came near Him; much more by those who touched His garment, and still more by those who had His divine hands laid upon them.

"How far He worked what we call miracles, I don't know, or even care greatly. The word itself is hard to define. We live in the midst of miracles. How the unconscious seed can carry in itself the experience of a thousand thousand years; how a baby can hold in its comprehension all the thoughts and peculiarities of its myriad forefathers, and thus be an epitome of the race, I can't even imagine: our living and being are a perpetual miracle. Jesus was, no doubt, disinclined to gratify the childish desire of His disciples for signs and wonders; but——"

"Then I was right," cried Renan, "on the main point, though I do not quite follow what you mean by virtue coming out of him, or your insistence on his divinity. Surely you do not believe in that?"

I did not wish to push our disagreement to a dispute.

"We have all something of the divine in us, have we not?" I replied. "Virtue comes out of you even in a discussion, *cher maître*.

"One cannot but agree with the greater part of what you say about miracles and other occurrences, and you have said it all wonderfully. Every one acknowledges that you are one of the great masters of French prose; the garment of your thought is so easy, so graceful, so rhythmic. Besides you have

dared to appeal to the heart, and yet avoided mawkishness by deft touches of irony—spangles on the robe."

He swallowed it all greedily, smiling and twirling his thumbs. The "spangles" on the robe even pleased him. The theatricality of the phrase he put down to my weakness in French, whereas I really meant that the Parisian touches of irony — "One can't live up to being always a son of God"—were revolting mistakes in a life of Jesus, and the touches of amused superiority which please nearly all Frenchmen, offend our severer tastes. But it was not worth while to try to correct his illimitable conceit.

It now remains for me to discover the reason of Renan's partial failure; to show why he was unable to see Jesus as He was. I might do this through his intellect or through his character, or both. I should perhaps first trace his philosophy to its sources and show its inadequacy, demonstrate that the conclusions on which his mind rested were not certainties, as he imagined, but self-deceptions, that at bottom he was an absolute infidel, incapable of believing in miracles or in prayer, or indeed in virtue, in any vital distinction between good and evil. And a man by nature incredulous is constitutionally incapable of understanding a believer, much less a prophet or a saint.

Renan is a sort of glass in which one sees the reflection of all the important thought-waves of his time: he had learnt from Kant to believe in the spiritual or, rather, in the mental world; from Hegel a certain tinge of mysticism and a desire to reconcile contradictions in a higher synthesis; but it was Schopenhauer's pessimism which had affected the very current of his blood. All this, his own intellectual limitations and the various influences which had played upon him from different angles, so to speak, can be traced in his philosophic writings. He shows his naïve, youthful enthusiasm in *The Future of Science,* and his later complete disillusion in *Metaphysics and its Future,* and in the famous *Letter to Berthelot.*

A glance at his so-called contradictions will lead us to the heart of the mystery. One critic complains that Renan's contradictions are "wilful." Or do they arise, as Renan himself explained, from a desire to show all the different facets of truth? Another condemns his "liking for contradictions" as having degenerated into a trick of manner, and this is a friendly French critic. The thinker should resemble a lighthouse, according to Renan, and throw the white radiance now through green and now through red glasses in order to attract the inattentive; but the high seriousness of truth hardly lends itself to such illusion. Many of Renan's contradictions are not accidental or formal, but of the

essence; the assertions of a Gallio who will use fact or fiction indifferently as they chance to suit his immediate purpose.

His treatment of Moses is typical of his whole method. First of all, he states the problem admirably, without shirking any of its difficulties; coolly, dispassionately, as a scientist and historian he tells us that Moses, unlike Jesus, is not an historical personage. St. Paul assuredly had good reason for his belief that Jesus had lived and had suffered on the Cross, and St. Paul was a contemporary whose good faith it is impossible to doubt. On the other hand, the oldest mention of Moses occurs four or five centuries after he was supposed to have lived and led the Israelites out of Egypt. No one could state the case against Moses more forcibly. Renan even asserts that the whole story of the Exodus itself may be a fable, and that all we can feel sure of is the bare fact that the Jews left Egypt and took possession of the Holy Land. Nothing could be clearer or in closer accord with truth; but as soon as Renan begins his narrative he forgets his scepticism and tells us of the "burning bush," and the way the bitter waters of Marah were rendered drinkable; he will even point out the place where the leaders of the expedition appear to him to have formed precise plans for the conquest of Canaan. Renan is a sceptic backed by an artist, and as artist he must have affirmations and beliefs, visions even;

and so extraordinary contradictions creep into his work. He is like one of those lunatics who is utterly indifferent to money and yet persists in amassing false coins and collecting spurious notes on the "Bank of Invention." As a sceptic and critic he will tell you that the history of Samson has suffered by being touched up (*d'étranges retouches*); twenty pages further on the artist assures you that the story has not been touched at all (*n'a pas été retouchée*).

The truth is Renan has the creative imagination of a poet, and he uses the fact as a springboard by means of which he may rise higher into the blue.

His real creed is to be found in his philosophic *Dialogues;* they start with what he regards as "Certainties," then pass to "Probabilities," and finally rise to "Dreams." But Renan's most cherished "certainties" would be "dreams" to less imaginative natures. It seems certain to him that "this world has a purpose and a goal," that "we are the playthings of a higher egotism which uses men as pawns in a game," and that "we are often duped cunningly by nature to fulfil some purpose which transcends all our imagining." It is a "certainty" forsooth that nature "is moving towards some end"; it is a "probability" that such motion is a progress not only through the ages, but from "world to world."

And if you ask him for the inspiring cause of this evolutionary process or for the objective to

which we are tending, he will confuse things with words, and assert that "this cause is the desire to be, the thirst for consciousness, the necessity that the ideal should be realized." ("Cette cause fut le désir d'être, la soif de conscience, la necessité qu'il y avait à ce que l'idéal fût representé.") He insists that the "evolution of the ideal is at once the object and moving cause of the universe. The pure idea is only a potentiality; matter in itself is powerless; the idea can only reach consciousness by incarnating itself in matter." And then, if you please, he calmly sums up: "everything comes from matter; but it is the idea which is the soul, the animating principle which aspires to self-realization, and thus reaches to life—*Voilà Dieu!*" To try to criticize such Hegelian rhapsody would be just as profitable as the attempt to dissect moonbeams. But that *Voilà Dieu* is beyond price, a jewel of French art.

It must be perfectly plain to any careful student that Renan's mind is saturated with opposing and contradictory hypotheses: at one moment he is in love with the "idea" of Hegel, at the next with the Darwinian theory of evolution, and then he falls back into the crudest anthropomorphism and talks of "the object and purpose of the universe" as if he had just been listening to a sermon by Bossuet.

But this net-like eclecticism is characteristic of the age, and, curiously enough, in his "Dreams"

Renan reaches beyond his own time to the thought of our day. Starting with the idea that the object of the universe is an ever more complete self-consciousness, an ever increasing vitalization of matter by thought, Renan, with his poetic imagination, is forced to realize this abstract purpose by clothing the general consciousness in a personality who, concentrating in himself all human knowledge, becomes in some sort superhuman. Renan invented the *Superman* before Nietzsche. But it is a mere supposition that science and its applications will fall to the control of an ever smaller number of people as Renan believes. None of the myriad discoveries of our time has this esoteric character; none of the military inventions tends to concentrate power in the hands of an individual; the *Superman* is just as subjective a fancy as "the aim and purpose of the universe," which can be traced from æon to æon, and from planet to planet. The whole thing is a bubble blown by a supersubtle sceptic who will console himself for the shortcomings and obscurities of reality by accepting his fancies for facts.

And just as in Renan's philosophy one is forced to find the sceptic-artist utterly indifferent to truth, so in his plays the artist nature reveals itself with entire frankness. Again and again one is brought up with a shock by his extraordinary, abnormal sensuality. Here are really the two poles between which the man swings. He was a hopeless un-

believer, and at the same time given over to all pleasures, pleasures of thought, pleasures of sentiment (his heroes love to weep like women), pleasures of the senses. As we have seen, he was gross in body, indolent physically; altogether unable to appreciate finely either an athlete or a saint, much less a hero. His plays show us this side of him with astonishing naïveté. One needs only to turn over the leaves of *L'Abbesse de Jouarre* to find Renan in his habit as he lived. In this play he lets himself go and reaches the nadir of absurdity. The Abbess, who gives herself for the first time in prison to the man she loves, declares in the morning that "fate never accords twice to any human being such pleasure" as she has enjoyed. Her assertion is as general as her experience is limited. The play does not need further description: it is an object-lesson in the ludicrous weaknesses of abnormal sensuality.

Renan believed that if the inhabitants of the world were informed that they were destined to perish within two or three days, every Man Jack of us would rush at some Jill or other, and insist on embracing her at the supreme moment; "the last sigh would become a kiss," he says, "and we should all 'die of pleasure.'" Nothing could be more ridiculously absurd or further from English notions. Some men would meet death in prayer; some in cheering their loved ones; some with smiling courage; others with cursings and despair, or in sullen

patience. It is safe to say that not one in a hundred would carry out Renan's preposterous forecast.

He takes himself for a measure of the ideal, and he is not justified. The reason of his failure is unmistakable. First of all, he is a Frenchman, and the French are somewhat obsessed by the sense of sex, apt to be too much given to sensual delights. Then, too, Renan was brought up as a priest, and his natural desires thereby subjected to unnatural restraint. In consequence of this he seems to have found sex-attraction quite irresistible; he is weaker even than the ordinary Frenchman; he does not only yield to temptation; he seeks it out.

There is one sentence of Renan's which I regard as his most characteristic confession. He declares that "modern philosophy will find its last expression in the drama, or, rather, in the opera: for music and the illusions of the lyric stage are admirably adapted to continue the thought into the vague region which lies beyond the reach of words."

("La philosophie modern aura de même sa dernière expression dans un drame, ou plutôt dans un opéra; car la musique et les illusions de la scène lyrique serviraient admirablement à continuer la pensée, au moment où la parole ne suffit plus à l'exprimer.")

I always think that if Renan had had any gift for music he would have expressed himself most fully in some modern opera. In reality he was

a sort of sister-soul to Gounod, and might have written the passion-music of another *Faust*.

His limitations can best be seen in his work on St. Paul. For there he is face to face with a real person, and we can judge him as against a known standard. Paul is not only a real historical personage; but he lends reality to the other chief actors in the world-drama, to Peter and James and John, even to Jesus Himself—all owe something to Paul's intense vitality. For Paul is something more than an historical figure and contemporary witness of the Gospel story; he is his own biographer, and has revealed himself in certain of the Epistles with an extraordinary particularity and vividness. We know his beliefs and his opinions on the most important questions; we can see them growing even, for his letters were dictated, and have therefore all the characteristics of familiar and passionate speech. Paul has given us a series of photographs of his very soul, all the truer and more interesting because they are unstudied and unconscious; we know his indignations and his lovingkindness, his blessings, and his cursings, his bold self-assertion and profound humility, the flaming spirit of him, and the great tender heart.

His style is the man. What eloquence there is in the unadorned, bare enumeration of his labors and sufferings; what lyric power in his apocalypse of the resurrection; what grace and charm and

sweet-thoughted poetry in his praise of charity (love). And yet, when not upborne on the broad wings of some intense emotion, what a style! Is there anything in all literature so inchoate, so barbarous? What a mixture of conflicting metaphors and repetitions; of violent assertions and of hair-splitting quibbles; here an elaborate argument broken off in the middle and left unfinished; there antitheses of thought dragged in by assonances of language; quotations from the Old Testament tossed together with stories of travel and shipwreck, all foaming before us like a mountain-torrent in spate—headlong, muddy, irresistible.

Yet no one has pictured himself in every line as this man has done. We recognize his very voice, his Jewish accent, his contempt of grammar, his harping on one or two favorite words; his vehement, abrupt, magnificent talk like hot scoriæ shot through with veins of gold. He moves before us and casts a shadow; the little, stout, bow-legged Jew, with the bald head and black beard, the prominent, hooked nose and thick eyebrows, and the glowing, inspiring eyes; are we not told that at one moment he seemed like a man and at another had "the face of an angel."

In a thousand pages Boswell has not managed to show us Johnson as clearly as Paul discovers himself to us in a couple of letters. There is no man in history or in literature so well known to

us, no other figure of such intense vitality, moving in so searching a light.

Renan has his own way of classifying great men, and Paul does not find favor in his sight. "In the sacred procession of humanity," he says, "the good man comes first, and after him the servant of Truth, the savant, or philosopher, and then the priest of Beauty, the artist or the poet. . . . Jesus appears to us with a halo, an ideal of goodness and beauty. But what was Paul? He was not a saint. The dominant trait of his character is not goodness; he was proud, harsh, obstinate; he defended himself and asserted himself; he used wounding words; he thought himself always in the right; stuck to his own opinion and alienated many. . . . He was not a savant. . . . He was not a poet. . . . What was he? A great man of action: a fearless, enthusiastic, conquering spirit, a missionary, a zealot. . . . But the man of action, even at his highest when struggling for a noble cause is not so close to God as he who spends himself in the service of the Good, the True, or the Beautiful. . . . Paul is inferior to Peter or to St. Francis. . . . He is like Luther; the same violence of speech, the same passion, the same energy, the same noble independence, the same fanatical attachment to a thesis which he regards as absolute and eternal truth."

Interesting as all this is, it is inadequate and

unfair: a judgment of Paul to-day must at least found itself on the judgment of the past eighteen centuries: we are prepared for a modification of that judgment; but not for a contradiction of it. And what is the judgment of the centuries about Paul? Let us listen to Scherer, who is a safer guide on such a matter than Renan. After telling us that Paul gave himself much trouble and wasted a great deal of eloquence in order to put himself among the disciples of Jesus, Scherer decides that Paul was "greater than any of the twelve," and he adds boldly, grounding himself on that secular judgment of which I have spoken, "posterity regards Paul as the bravest of the soldiers of Christ, the first of the Apostles, the immortal missionary to the Gentiles."

Renan knows all this; no one better, but the knowledge does not conciliate him: he is an amiable, pleasure-loving unbeliever, a French artist, who touches sainthood, so to speak, only through soft tolerance.

The daring and force of Paul; his devotion to the truth as shown for example in his reproof of Peter, and in his touching confession of his own nervous weakness and sexual impotence; his immitigable resolution, his stubborn-proud poverty, and self-denial are all intolerable to Renan.

"Paul was too aggressive," he cries again and

again; "he had not the persuasiveness, the tenderness, the gentleness of Jesus."

That is true to some extent; but, as Scherer has well said, "Paul is the complement of Jesus: Paul is nearer to us; he is of our flesh and our spirit, and we are accordingly better able to measure his greatness."

Renan does not overlook the great chapter on Charity, or Paul's constant solicitude for the faithful, but he will not accept anything as proof of the great Apostle's exceeding tenderness of heart.

In fine, Renan's portrait of Jesus is, as I have tried to show, a French portrait; but still it is a portrait inspired by sympathy and a certain comprehension; his picture of Paul is a caricature; he had no love for the heroic fighter, no understanding of his unique value and importance. Without Paul, Christianity, it seems to me, might have perished in obscurity as a flower too fragile-fair for this harsh, unfriendly world.

Renan does not even notice the most astonishing thing in Paul's history—the confession in which Paul discovers his own defect relentlessly. Paul was converted by Jesus Himself. The first thing he should have done, one imagines, was to hurry to Jerusalem to interview the disciples, to talk with the brethren and, above all, with the mother of the Master, and thus collect at first hand every scrap of evidence, every particle of knowledge that could throw light

upon the Divine Figure. It would then have been his duty and his joy to have set forth the whole story in the most complete and convincing way.

Paul did nothing of the sort; he went off into the desert, he tells us, for three years by himself; as an unbeliever would say, to evolve Jesus out of his own internal consciousness. And when at length he went to Jerusalem it was only for a casual visit of a fortnight and not as a pilgrimage to the Holy of Holies.

What a book Paul could have written about Jesus, the Christ, with the knowledge he might have gathered had he wished; Paul with his passionate soul and his genius for expression! He was the greatest man then living on this earth, and he might have given us a book as much finer than the New Testament as the New is finer than the Old: *The Life of Jesus* by Paul would have been the Gospel of humanity for three or four thousand years. It was Paul whom Dante should have charged with "the great refusal."

This confession of Paul makes several things plain to us. First of all, he must have known a good deal about Jesus and his preaching, even when he was persecuting His followers. Again and again he must have been pierced by this shaft of divine wisdom and by that; suddenly he was stricken to the heart. He needed no further knowledge: Jesus had taught him to take love as the supreme, the infallible

guide, and in a moment he had learned the lesson; the light blinded him. Paul then must have been nearly on Christ's level—a fact surely borne out by the divine chapter on Charity. It was Paul who took the gold of Christ's Gospel, mixed it with hard alloy, broke it up into convenient forms, and so gave it currency among men.

. . . . . .

I always avoided talking to Renan about Paul: I did not want to dispute with him again, so I contented myself with praise of his learning, and the immense labors he had undergone, and left it at that.

It was impossible not to be grateful to him for what he had done: why should one be annoyed with him for being what he was? His *Life of Jesus* is there and holds the field till a better shall appear, and a better is not likely to be written for many a year to come.

For both as a scientific historian and an artist-writer, Renan is in the first rank. I have dealt mainly with his shortcoming as an artist, for every one is acquainted with his extraordinary achievement, and in the same way I have tried to show some of the mistakes into which his duality of nature led him. It is only fair therefore to remark that now and again the scientific spirit of our time found perfect expression in his pages. He has a passage on the immortality of the soul, which might be

recommended to all those who are inclined to take their desires as a forecast of fulfilment. He says:

"The belief in the spirituality of the soul and in a personal immortality, far from being a product of profound reflection, is at bottom a relic of the childish conceptions of the savage who is incapable of careful analysis of a mental process. Primitive man in his naïve realism imagines a soul in whatever moves; he speaks therefore of the spirit of the fire or the spirit of lightning."

Immortality to Renan is nothing more than the shadow cast by desire, and the Happy Hunting Grounds, or the jewellers' Heaven, are only the mirage of unsatisfied appetite.

The truth about Renan holds praise enough for most mortals. He approached his great task with an extraordinary stock of learning and a far rarer fount of admiration and loving sympathy, and though born a pleasure-loving sceptic in an incredulous age and of a faithless people, he nevertheless came into more intimate relations with Jesus the Christ than any of the Fathers of the Church, and has given us a better picture of the Divine Master than can be found anywhere outside the Bible—"By their fruits ye shall know them."

WHISTLER: ARTIST AND FIGHTER

"Opposition makes the wise man mad."—BLAKE.

IT was the report of the trial with Ruskin which first made me familiar with the name of Whistler. His answers under cross-examination pleased me mightily; proved he was a man of courage and capacity. The condemnation of his work by popular painters convinced me that he would not have been attacked so bitterly by the mediocrities had he not been a man of genius. Ruskin's preposterous fling, and its success and the favor shown him by the crowd filled me with contempt for the critic whom till then I had admired, to a certain extent, for his beautiful rhythmic prose.

When I first settled in London in the early eighties I was eager to meet Whistler: though I didn't dream at that time that he was a genius in the high sense of the word, the English leader of a new artistic renascence. With the bias of the writer, I thought the intellectual leaders should be men of letters and should handle the greatest medium, that of words, and not merely color and form.

Naturally, therefore, I first came to know

Whistler through his literary talent and wit, and without this ladder would probably not have reached comprehension for a long time; but even at first my opinion of him was far higher than the opinions I heard about me. He was always quarrelling, I was told, a peculiar little fellow, inordinately conceited, and bitter without reason—"a tongue like a whiplash, and very American," was the usual summary verdict.

At first sight I was struck, as I imagine every one was struck, by his appearance; an alert, wiry little person of five feet four or five; using a single eyeglass and very neatly dressed, though always with something singular in his attire—the artist's self-conscious protest which gave him a certain exotic flavor and individuality. He wore his abundant curly black hair rather long, and just over the forehead a little lock of quite white hair like a plume; in the street a French top hat—a stove-pipe, as it is called—with a straight brim which shouted: "I'm French, and proud of it!" at the passers by.

The second or third time I met him I noticed that his features were well shaped: both chin and forehead broad; the eyes remarkable, piercing, and aggressive; a greying black moustache, inclined to curl tightly, added a note of defiance. Though they were not really alike, the expression of his face reminded me of Edmond de Goncourt and Tourgenief's description of his eyes: "luisants et sombres

et pas bons du tout" (shining, sombre eyes, anything but kindly). Whistler's eyes were grey-blue and gimlet-keen—"anything but kindly," and the moustache and carriage intensified the cocky challenge of the fighter: Whistler always reminded me of a bantam.

In every assembly he always stood apart; with a certain perky distinction; an unsparing, frank critic: one talked to him, drew him out expecting incisive, caustic comment.

One day he asked me to breakfast: I accepted, for he piqued my curiosity; I wanted to know more of him, felt certain he had something new to say; and I was eager to hear. At the breakfast I met five or six society people—notably Lady Archie Campbell, a very enthusiastic admirer of the master. In the course of the breakfast some one asked Whistler what he thought of Frank Holl, the English portrait painter who had had some vogue, it appeared, a little earlier.

"A talent, not a genius, Holl, quite English, you know; content with the colored photograph kind of thing that all the old fellows did, and some of 'em did better. Art's not imitation, that's clear, eh?" and his eyes probed.

The wilfulness and quickness of the man were at odds with the drawling American accent; he puzzled me a little, but even then I was ready to

go with him a good way; art, I thought, was interpretation, not merely imitation, and I said so.

"That's it," Whistler took me up abruptly, "a personal interpretation or impression, blessed with beauty and brevity, eh?" and again his eyes bored in.

His talk was suggestive; but a little one-sided, I thought, not realizing then fully how much greater in art the half is than the whole.

Somewhat later I asked him a little maliciously what he thought of Oscar Wilde.

"I have his scalp," he laughed, "but am not proud of it: Oscar is imitator, not artist."

"He may outgrow that," I remarked.

"The sponge is always sponging," was Whistler's quick retort.

He was taken away by Lady Archie Campbell, who wanted to tell him how much she admired the portrait of a girl in his studio. He took us to see it, frankly interested without a trace of pose or self-consciousness; though he showed a marked deference to the great lady which amused me. As soon as he knew you a little he couldn't help telling you that he had been a student at West Point, a military cadet; he took the romantic, chivalric view of things by preference; yet he spoke of his work with curious detachment, in jerked-out phrases, astoundingly sincere in their simplicity, and astoundingly veracious as well.

"One wants the spirit, the aroma, don't ye know?"

and he glanced away from the picture to see if we understood. As no one answered he insisted: "If you paint a young girl, youth should scent the room: a thinker, thoughts should be in the air; an aroma of the personality. . . . And with all that it should be a picture, a pattern, a harmony only a painter could conceive. . . . I sometimes say an arrangement in black and white, or blue and gold, don't ye know?" The eyes gimletted one: "Do they understand?" the eyes seemed to ask, "the dullards—do they even know that each art has its own grammar and its own aim?"

This first real talk showed me that Whistler was an original artist, a force to be reckoned with, and at the same time he was sympathetic to me; his courage and quickness were obvious; his conceit justified, his vanity harmless, even his frankness seemed to argue a kindly nature.

His famous *Ten o'clock* lecture confirmed my judgment, and put him definitely on a pedestal, he talked with the sincerity and authority of a great artist. The perky figure on the platform; the exquisitely appropriate speech—now quick, pointed sentences darting like rapier-thrusts, now the linking melody of rhythmic phrases—all alike excellent. The inimitable cheeky delivery of his attacks made him delightfully real and vital; the insight and authority of his message held one: a modern master,

I said to myself, human to the heart and yet a master.

Again and again his humor flashed; the Experts "sombre of mien and wise with the wisdom of books . . . speculating in much writing upon the great worth of bad work . . ."; the Critic who "never sees the masterpiece at all": and finally the Preacher "appointed! . . . Sage of the Universities . . . learned in many matters, and of much experience in all, save his subject . . . bringing powers of persuasion and polish of language to prove—nothing. . . ."

The most brilliant persiflage of English pedantry ever written, and written by a painter!

And when he spoke of his art and of the artist as the high-priest of the mysteries of Beauty, a grave emotion colored his words, and the sentences arranged themselves cunningly, evoking unforgettable pictures.

"The artist," he said, "does not confine himself to purposeless copying, without thought, each blade of grass, as commended by the inconsequent, but, in the long curve of the narrow leaf, corrected by the straight tall stem, he learns how grace is wedded to dignity, how strength enhances sweetness, that elegance shall be the result. . . ."

"Through his brain, as through the last alembic, is distilled the refined essence of that thought which

began with the Gods, and which they left him to carry out."

"Set apart by them to complete their works, he produces that wondrous thing called the masterpiece, which surpasses in perfection all that they have contrived in what is called Nature; and the Gods stand by and marvel, and perceive how far more beautiful is the Venus of Melos than was their own Eve."

That lecture won me to complete sympathy; the comments of the audience and the Press exasperated me: no one seemed to see that the speech was the greatest ever heard in London. Even Oscar Wilde pooh-poohed my praise of it as exaggerated; it had, however, made one convert.

Whistler's fiery combativeness now excited in me nothing but approval. He's had a pretty hard time, I thought, as all great men are sure to have everywhere, and most of all in England, where the pillory is specially reserved for great artists. He's evidently "the wicked animal" of the well-known French proverb, "who defends himself when he's attacked," and he has been attacked so often, and his courage is so high that he's always ready to take the offensive. In the *Ten o'clock* he gave his own portrait: "The Artist has always cause to be merry at the 'pompous pretention and solemn silliness' that surrounds him, for Art and Joy go together with bold openness, and high head and ready hand—fearing naught."

One evening he dined with me and talked with extraordinary animation and eloquence about his art. I noticed that he was a different man when dining almost alone and when there was a large party. By himself he was without affectation or aggressiveness, but as soon as there was an audience he wanted to take the floor and monopolize the conversation.

On another occasion there were half a dozen of us, and Whistler held forth about his discovery of the Thames, as he called it. A personage at the table rather resented the suggestion that no one had ever seen the beauty in mists and fogs because it had not been painted before, and the little difference grew somewhat acrid. At length the great man remarked that "conceit was no proof of ability." Whistler took him up sharply:

"Quite right, conceit is what we call the other fellow's self-respect, don't ye know?"

"It's the excessive egotism I dislike," grumbled the great person, turning away and beginning pointedly to speak to the host.

Some one said something encouraging to Whistler, who remarked in the air:

"Yes, yes, he forgot himself, but then he is quite right to forget what isn't worth remembering."

Whistler was certainly "a first-rate fighting man." Often he attacked without justification. I may be allowed to give one characteristic example when I

could give twenty. Every one knows the bare facts about Swinburne's famous article on his works which appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* for June, 1888.

Whistler's biographers, the Pennells, have decided that "it cannot be denied that he had every reason for seeing a challenge in Swinburne's article. He was stung to the quick, but even in his anger he couldn't forget the friendship of the past."

The truth is, and there can be no breach of confidence now in publishing the fact, that Whistler asked for the article. Mr. Theodore Watts was approached and told that Whistler would be very glad indeed if Swinburne, who had known his work for years, would say what he thought about it. It was pointed out that Whistler hadn't the position that his great talent deserved, and that it would be an act of kindness on Swinburne's part to help him to wider recognition. Swinburne was good enough to do what was asked of him.

Immediately after the article appeared came Whistler's contemptuous note in *The World,* in which, criticizing Swinburne, he spoke of the "scientific irrelevancies and solemn popularities of a serious and ungrateful Sage, whose mind was not narrowed by knowledge."

The last paragraph of his letter ran:

"Thank you, my dear! I have lost a confrère; but then, I have found an acquaintance—one Algernon Swinburne—'outsider'—Putney."

It was an outrageous response to an act of kindness, and, naturally enough, Swinburne was very much annoyed.

At the time only a few knew of the dignified kind letter Whistler wrote to Swinburne before publishing his sneer in *The World,* the letter published in *The Gentle Art* under the title *Et tu Brute,* in which he talks to Swinburne in the proper spirit:

"Who are you, deserting your Muse, that you should insult my Goddess with familiarity and the manners of approach common to the reasoners in the market-place? . . . Shall I be brought to the bar by my own blood, and be borne false witness against before the plebeian people?"

He requested Swinburne to stick to his fine poetry and not "stray about blindly in his brother's flowerbeds and bruise himself!"

But good as this private letter is, it still seems to me not to be justified, for Whistler had asked for the article and should have been content with it

After all, Swinburne praised Whistler's painting warmly, as far as he could understand it, and at the time Swinburne as a poet stood far higher in popular esteem than Whistler as a painter. Swinburne's paper unquestionably did Whistler a very considerable service, and his good intent was ill rewarded by that contemptuous bitter letter in *The World* which was all the public knew of the matter.

I didn't overestimate the importance of the affair,

but when next I met Whistler, which happened to be at a friend's table, I suppose he must have felt that I was not so enthusiastically cordial as I had been, for he attacked me with a spice of malevolence. He waited, I remember, till the dinner was finished and the ladies had retired. When the host came up to our end of the table he had Whistler on his right just opposite me. Suddenly Whistler took up something I had said.

"Your appointment as editor of *The Fortnightly* set every one guessing," he began: "is he by any chance a man of genius, or just another of the able editors, don't ye know! always to be found by the dozen in merry England? Well, we all wondered for a little while."

The guests were all eyes and ears: Whistler's reputation being established.

"Of course, every one knew how a genius would edit such a review after Mr. John Morley. First of all would come a most astonishing number; a reckless criticism of some great painter by a poet; then a poem by a painter, something novel, don't ye know, the caricature of a bishop by Carlo Pelligrini, something unexpected—amazing. . . ."

"All the world would rush to buy the next month's number; but there would be none to be found; the editor would be resting or gone to Monte Carlo. The month after, another gorgeous surprise! But no! you've not done it in the brilliant erratic way

of genius. Every month the review appears regularly, just what one looks for, a work of high-class English mediocrity: lamentable, you know, quite lamentable."

Every one laughed as the master repeated again and again scornfully, "high-class mediocrity."

For some time I tried to parry the attack, covering myself with my youth and inexperience; but Whistler only laughed triumphantly, repeating, "honest mediocrity, well-meaning, don't ye know! industrious and all that; but——" and the forefinger pointed the barb.

At length anger gave me better counsel.

"Strange," I said, "how your views of art, Master, are echoed in Paris. I was talking with Degas the other day; you know, he, too, is a great painter with a tongue like a whip. I asked him what he thought of English painters, and he made fun of them: he wouldn't hear of Leighton, or Millais, or any of them, and at last I said, 'But what do you think of Whistler? Whistler surely is a master?'

" 'Vistlaire?' he repeated, 'connais pas: jamais entendu ce nom-là. Que fait-il?'

"Of course I tried to explain how great you were, Master; described your marvellous color-schemes, amazing arrangements: impressions like Hokusai; but Degas only shrugged his shoulders: 'Connais pas—Vistlaire, connais pas du tout!'

"So at last in despair I told him that you, too,

were a wit, as he was, with a bitter tongue, an extraordinary talent of speech, the wittiest talker in England.

" 'Dommage,' Degas broke in, 'he should paint with his tongue, then he might be a genius.' "

Every one laughed, delighted to see the biter bit; but it was some time before the cordial relations between Whistler and myself were restored. It seemed to me that he attacked his friends as eagerly as his enemies, and I avoided him, not wishing to quarrel with a man of genius, whose work I could not help admiring.

A year or so later, however, we met again casually, and I asked him to lunch, and he accepted smilingly, without a trace of bitterness, *en bon escrimeur.*

If he were inclined to sacrifice friendship too cheaply for a biting jest or witty word, he was still more ready for the sake of an intellectual triumph to make enemies of the indifferent or even of those willing to like him.

An instance occurs to me: A rich man, rather a bore, had wanted to meet him for some time. At length he got himself invited by Mr. Fletcher Moulton, now Lord Moulton, the Judge. When they went into the dining-room the rich man found himself right opposite Whistler who was on his host's right; but for some time, to his annoyance, he couldn't get a chance to place a word. Whistler talked almost without ceasing. After some joke of the Master,

however, there came a pause and immediately the bore seized the opportunity; leaning forward with uplifted forefinger he began:

"One word, Mr. Whistler, one word! Today I passed your house and——"

Quick as a flash, Whistler interrupted:

"Thank you, thank you!" and began to relate another incident.

The intellectual speed shown in the retort was as astonishing as the rudeness was unpardonable. But if ungenerous in intercourse with ordinary people, Whistler was just as quick to appreciate ability even in his enemies. Wherever he found good work, whether in art or literature, he praised it wholeheartedly. It was hardly to be expected that this dainty and exquisite Muse should admire the cruel realism of Degas, or the bronze made flesh of Rodin; but Whistler welcomed nearly every high artistic quality, however different from his own striving. He praised Manet and Puvis de Chavannes enthusiastically, and seemed utterly devoid of jealousy. Through his admiration of Chinese pottery and bronzes and Japanese prints and pictures Whistler led the way to that wider understanding of Art which is a characteristic of our day. And some of the younger men like Beardsley owed him the frankest and most generous recognition.

Alexander Harrison, the painter, has given the most understanding appreciation of Whistler's real

nature. As an example of pure insight it stands alone:

"I have never known a man of more sincere and genuine impulse even in ordinary human relations, and I am convinced that no man ever existed who could have been more easily controlled on lines of response to a 'fair and square' appreciation of his genuine qualities. When off his guard he was often a pathetic kid, and I have spotted him in bashful moods, although it would be hard to convince the bourgeois of this. Wit, pathos, gentleness, affection, audacity, acridity, tenacity were brought instantly to the sensitive surface like a flash, by rough contact."

I think perhaps Whistler's pettiest fault was that he had a poor memory for kindness done. But, after all, ingratitude is the mark of all the tribes of man, and I dare say he was no more forgetful of benefits than the rest of us.

For a good many years I saw him from time to time casually. Now he lunched with me; now dined: once or twice I dined with him. But our relations were never intimate. We belonged to different generations, and I couldn't be a disciple and sit at the feet of any Gamaliel.

One day when he was dining with me he told me that the Glasgow Corporation was trying to buy his portrait of Carlyle. I was exceedingly glad to hear it, and said so: it was the only thing for them to do. He went on to confess with contemptu-

ous bitterness that they were haggling with him over the price. I asked him how much he wanted, and he replied a thousand guineas. I begged him not to take less; assured him I could find some one who would give him a thousand guineas for the picture if the tradesmen refused it. He was very anxious, pathetically anxious I thought, to know whether he could rely on the money: he seemed a little dispirited. I told him he could make his mind easy on the matter: the money would be forthcoming. On this he brightened up remarkably, and declared that the fillip was all he needed; he knew the Scotchmen wanted the picture and were only bargaining; and a couple of days later he came and told me that the canny Scots had agreed to pay the thousand, and all was settled.

Whistler was always inclined to be combative and his love of fighting grew in maturity with his skill in verbal fencing. I have sometimes thought that he was so willing to fight because he had already painted all the best pictures in him and was no longer pregnant with new conceptions.

My next talk with Whistler illustrates this. I went to call on him in Paris in the rue du Bac. The modest house has been described by others, the exquisite yet effective simplicity of the decoration, and the charming garden impressed every one. At length the master was properly lodged, and might be expected to do some great picture.

I found him in a state of dancing excitement over *Trilby*. I couldn't understand his rage with Du Maurier, even when he told me that Du Maurier had formerly been a friend. The quarrel seemed to me altogether trivial. I felt it unworthy of a great man like Whistler to allow himself to be plagued and maddened at the buzzing of such a bluebottle. But I had to listen to the whole story from A to Z, and how it ended with the apology of the publishers, and with Du Maurier's changing his sketch of Whistler into some bald-headed gentleman called Antony, and Whistler's characteristic quip:

"I wired to them over in America, 'Compliments and complete approval of author's new and obscure friend, Bald Antony.' "

He had wasted what seemed to me an unconscionable amount of time and energy over this unworthy attack. Men had treated him contemptuously for so many years, life had been so unjust to him that his temper had got raw; every touch smarted, and he was up in arms and eager to fight to the death for a casual rub.

When next I called on him in the rue du Bac I found him in the throes of another combat; the quarrel with Sir William Eden over his wife's portrait. All the world knows the details: how George Moore introduced the baronet to Whistler to paint the portrait of Lady Eden; and how Sir William Eden took it upon himself to pay the price he

thought fixed, without consulting the artist, who had done, not a pastel, as was first arranged, but a very charming portrait in oils of Lady Eden, a study in brown and gold.

It would have been more dignified of Whistler to have paid no attention to the baronet and his attempt to slip his "valentine" of a hundred guineas into the artist's pocket; but once again Whistler's combativeness came into play; he persisted in seeing intentional insult in everything, and in spite of all one could do, fought on to the bitter end: he couldn't speak of the baronet without mentioning his "brown boots." At length he went so far as to destroy his own work, and the result of the sittings which Lady Eden, who certainly was an innocent person, had granted him: painted out her face, and went into court after court over the matter, only to be condemned at the end as in the beginning.

He begged me, I remember, to write on the matter, and to please him I did write an article in *The Saturday Review,* taking his side, which from a high point of view was perhaps not justified, and was certainly unwise; for thereby I made myself bitter enemies without affirming Whistler's unstable friendship.

A later meeting with Whistler was destined to be unpleasant. I had again and again heard him speak of Mr. Walter Sickert with liking, and even appreciation, as a capable craftsman.

Accordingly, when Mr. Sickert came to me with an article about lithographs, setting forth that Whistler's lithographs were made on paper, and should not be called lithographs, I looked upon it as the trivial correction of a friend, and didn't dream that Whistler would feel hurt, much less insulted.

Forthwith, he or Mr. Pennell brought an action against me as editor of *The Saturday Review.* I could scarcely believe that the matter was serious, but I soon found that Whistler was prosecuting the affair with his usual energy.

One day, meeting Mr. Heinemann, with whom Whistler happened to be living at the time, I told him how silly the whole matter was, and how unpleasant: adding that I regretted it all, and would not for the world have hurt Whistler in any way.

Mr. Heinemann said he would try to settle the quarrel, and a little later very kindly invited me to meet Whistler at dinner. I went, and took the occasion to tell Whistler just what I had told Mr. Heinemann, that the whole dispute was trivial, that I wouldn't willingly have done anything to hurt him, and if I had suspected any malice in the matter I should never have published the article. He told me I must get Sickert to apologize. I replied that I couldn't ask Sickert to apologize; he would be sure to refuse. I pointed out that in his desire to hit Sickert he was really hitting me, who, after all, had been a friend.

"It can't be helped," he said perkily, "it'll have to go on then: it'll have to go on."

I shrugged my shoulders; wilful man must have his way.

The trial was full of amusing incidents. A sculptor, Mr. Alfred Gilbert, showed such virulence of personal enmity to me that the judge ordered him to stand down; and Whistler had as his chief witness Mr. Sidney Colvin, of the British Museum, who aforetime had been his butt, and was always coupled by him with 'Arry. The jury, after being out two hours, brought in a verdict of £50, and Whistler won his first law case, this time against one who had always been a friend and admirer. He didn't damage Sickert in any way, but, if his crowing over the result was any consolation to him, I am glad he had it.

I must find room here for a gibe or two of Whistler's which so far as I know have never been published, though they are both characteristic and witty without being malicious. When Mr. Theodore Watts, Swinburne's friend and housemate, took the name of Dunton, Whistler wrote him a post card: "Theodore, what's Dunton?"

One day in a second-hand bookshop he came upon a copy of his "Gentle Art" which he had given to someone after inscribing on the title-page:

"With the regards of the author."

It had evidently been sold for some few pence.

Whistler bought it, wrote in one word and sent it again to the ungrateful friend. The inscription now read:

"With the renewed regards of the author."

I have set down these acerbities and put them so far as I could in a fair light, not because I have the faintest wish to accentuate the little faults of a great spirit, but simply because Whistler's prickliness illustrates a truth too generally ignored. If ever there was a talent which should have been immediately appreciated in England it was the talent of Jimmy Whistler. No people love pure beauty as the English love it. Here was a man of genius whose chief aim and striving was the beautiful. He had no feeling for even greater things, none for sublimity, none for the tragic fate which often overwhelms the gifted, none for the great revolt which is the essence of all higher spiritual life. But beauty he loved with a passionate and exclusive devotion; the English should, therefore, have welcomed him with open arms. Yet instead of admiring the man who was a genius after their own heart, they treated him for thirty odd years with such indifference and contempt that at length they bred bitterness in him, and high disdain to balance their foolish injustice.

Towards the end of his life, when his powers to all appearance were at their best, this great artist and man of genius wasted his time and talent in unworthy and absurd quarrellings. He neglected

his art and allowed his gift to humanity to be diminished in order to gratify his vanity and temper. He had come to "his own and his own received him not," and he preferred to punish rather than to forgive. I have no quarrel with him on this account. The idea that the artist should accept slander and insult in the guise of criticism with slavish submission is worse than absurd. The wrong only begins to be righted when revolt shows the aggressor that his wrongdoing is apt to recoil on his own head. It is the duty of the artist or man of letters to teach the critics and professors that reverence for their betters is the proper attitude. No one finds fault with Dante for distributing his enemies over the deeper circles in hell, why should one condemn a Whistler for pillorying 'Arry or Sidney Colvin, the academic pedant? And if the artist has been so baited and insulted that at length he wastes too much energy on his unworthy assailants, who shall blame him?

Whatever heat is engendered by the passage of a star to its ordained orbit should be attributed to the resistance of the medium through which it passes. It would be wiser, of course, and nobler for the master to climb to Shakespeare's level and learn never to

> . . . prefer his injuries to his heart,
> To bring it into danger.

But it is only the very greatest who are able to take "the buffets and rewards" of life "with equal thanks," and, after all, in this world-old quarrel between the genius-teacher and his hearers the chief fault is always with the hearers.

The British public would do well now to consider their ways while it may yet be time, and begin to treat their artists and writers, the modern seers and prophets, with some consideration.

At heart Englishmen are all Robinson Crusoes, adventurers and colonizers. They are full of admiration for the man of action and of respect for the athletic virtues, and especially for obstinate courage. But they have no inkling of the qualities necessary to an artist, and they treat the greatest of the sons of men with a contemptuous pity that is really a measure of their own blind insensitiveness and want of imagination. They read of an explorer's struggling to reach the Pole with breathless enthusiasm and mourn his death in tears, thrilling with emulation, but they read of Ruskin's brainless and insulting attack on Whistler with delighted amusement, and when the crowd of academic nonentities ran together in the law courts to bait the man of genius their sympathy was all given to the crowd of envious dullards.

They know not what they do.

Let us try for a moment to look at the matter from the standpoint of the artist. Almost the first

thing that struck one in Whistler's attitude was the fact that though he was of Anglo-Saxon race and had lived by preference in London he missed no opportunity of girding at English estimates and English standards of value. He was proudly conscious that his artistic ideal was at variance with English conceptions of art, and the conventional English view of painting as a sort of colored photograph of some beautiful scene or person excited in him nothing but pity and contempt. And this disagreement spread into all departments of life. He despised the materialism of the race, the courage that was usually self-interested and all too seldom chivalric, and, above all, the honors showered on respectable greedy mediocrities. He illustrated Shakespeare's wonderful phrase in the Timon:

'Tis well with every land to be at odds.

Whistler was at odds with both England and America, was indeed an exile and pariah everywhere in this world, lonely and despised as the great artist seems fated to be.

Nevertheless his high courage and wit held to the end. When he was nearing seventy the English failures and hypocritical pretences in the South African war excited him to bitter gibing. After retreating from Spion Kop, the British Commander-in-Chief Sir Redvers Buller published a despatch so self-

congratulatory that it might have followed a victory. At the end he summed up the whole affair by saying, ". . . and so we retired without losing a gun or a mule or an ammunition wagon." Whistler loved to quote the words, adding, "or a moment's time."

One evening in Paris he was seated outside the Café de la Paix when a *Camelot* passed by shouting his paper: *"La Presse, La Presse! Grande Defaite des Anglais! 10,000 hommes tués! Voyez La Presse!"* Whistler bought a copy, to the huge disgust of an Englishman sitting near him. Whistler read the account half aloud till his choleric neighbor could stand it no longer:

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said to Whistler, "but surely you must know that such a defeat is all imaginary—a lie, sir, that's what it is!"

"Very likely," rejoined Whistler in his silkiest tones. "Very likely; but then, you see, it makes such very pleasant reading!"

And so he revenged himself on the Philistines.

In later life Whistler concentrated his affections on his wife, and when she was taken from him his chief interest in living died. He was too keen-sighted to have any illusions about a life beyond the grave: the undiscovered country to him was blank annihilation, and this black background cast a shadow over the world and intensified the misery of personal loss. A daring spirit, set to sadness and scorn of mediocrity, the mainspring in him was

always a high resolve to do the best with his extraordinary endowment.

No hero, no leader of men has ever displayed a more intense devotion to the ideal, or a more desperate resolve to do his uttermost at all costs. Whistler may stand as a type of the great artist for many a year to come. A man has no foes so obstinate as those within him, and more than other men the artist is plagued with those infernal adversaries: he is filled to the mouth with greeds and vanities and passions. The ordinary man wants comforts and security in life; the artist wants these and all the luxuries as well—bronzes, ivories, enamels, paintings, armors, tapestries, vellumed books, prints —everything curious and beautiful—and he wants them as aids to his own striving. Where another would be rich, he is poor. And while borne in this way hellwards toward self-gratification by an urging which is intertwined with what is noblest in him, he must at all costs resist the devil, and more than other men give himself to the ideal in order to bring his work as near perfection as possible.

Take the conflict at its simplest. Whistler saw that the more personal his art was, the better it became, and with the intuitive certainty of the great artist he began with a master's economy to simplify the symbol. At once the academicians burst out at him: "He can't draw," just as Reynolds talked of Blake. It was Whistler the innovator, Whistler

at his best that was most hated. It is hard when at variance with every one to persevere in a desperate undertaking. Even a Columbus is shaken in his resolve by the storm of sneers and insults on this side, hatred and contempt on that. And at the same time the artist must possess a nobler temper than is required of the explorer or captain. He must not only believe in himself absolutely and go on working in spite of insult and hatred, but he must work joyously, for if once he falls to anger or bitterness with his surroundings, his work will suffer.

Let us try to see Whistler's character in the proper light in connection with his work, and let us take the extremest example of his so-called conceit. One remembers the story of the lady who coupled him with Velasquez, assuring him that the only two sacred names to her in the history of art were Whistler and Velasquez.

"True, true, dear lady," remarked Whistler, "but why drag in Velasquez?"

Every one laughs at this and lifts eyebrows at the conceit; but there is nothing conceited in it. *"Why drag in Velasquez?"* is merited reproof. "Velasquez is dead; his work done; gone beyond our praise or blame for ever; but I, Whistler, am here doing the modern work: why couple me with the dead? why drag in Velasquez?"

Even if we take this as conceit, Whistler's power of self-criticism was at least as vigorous. The other

day a letter of his was sold at Sotheby's, a letter to Way, his printer, about some lithographs of his portrait of Count Robert de Montesquieu: here is his judgment of his own work:

> The portrait is damnable! I don't mean the printing, which is even as good as the thing to be printed was bad; and that is saying a lot. No, my drawing or sketch or whatever you choose is damnable, and no more like the superb original than if it had been done by my worst and most incompetent enemy. I hope to heaven that no one has seen it. Now wipe off the stone at once, at once sending me one proof on the commonest of paper of its destroyed state, and also every trial proof you may have taken, that I may myself burn all. There must be no record of this abomination! It is neither for catalogue nor posterity, and is the folly of proposing to produce the same masterpiece twice over. Why should one? Ridiculous! Now, on the other hand, the last little draped figure is delightful, and beautifully printed of course.

What do you think, reader, of this assured self-praise and passionate, complete self-condemnation? And even now perhaps you don't understand the inflexible conscience of the artist. Whistler needed money to live and work: here is a bank-note, so to speak.

"Tear it up," he cries, "the work is not my best: I'll not live by it, tear it up, let no replica of it be seen: I'll go hungry rather than give anything less than my best."

No adventurer, no Columbus ever showed such high resolve, such noble courage. Let us come to a final test.

The English law made a world-wide benefactor a bankrupt at fifty; Whistler would not or could not pay Ruskin's law costs and so his home was sold up; his pictures given away for a song: his household goods all dispersed and lost. His mother was weak and needed the comforts of money. He took her to a good home in a watering-place, and then, paint-box in hand, sallied forth to Venice when past middle age to build up another home, and incidentally a new fame. And the artist's courage is not that desperate unhappy dour resolution that a Carlyle looked on as the ideal: it is a smiling, joyous, happy valiance. Whistler knew that happiness was an essential of his art, and he kept his laughing wit undisturbed. The story of it is one of the great stories of the world. Nothing finer, nothing more heroic has been told of man. His creditors had put a man in possession of his house in Tite Street, Chelsea. Whistler clothed him decently and used him as a servant. At the end of the week the man came to him to be paid.

"I have nothing," said Whistler, "I thought the creditors paid you. At the moment I can't pay you."

"What am I to do?" cried the man, "my family is hard up, they want the money."

"Very terrible," exclaimed Whistler, "terrible.

I'm sorry. I'll get you the money by next Saturday: I'll paint something."

"But that won't do," said the man, "I must have some help now."

"I can think of nothing," said Jimmy, resolved to pawn something rather than not help: then the quick intelligence rippled into a smile, "I can think of nothing, but why not put a man in possession, then you'll be able to get along as I do."

That's how the artist has to face life: the wit is exceptional, but the heroism is common enough. Take it in another way. The pains of motherhood are excruciating; but suppose the mother were told that she must conceive in joy and bring forth not with groans but with smiles and witty stories, and at the same time use every endeavor to make each child fairer than the previous one; what should we think of her trial? There is no courage in the world, no fortitude to be compared with that of the artist.

To me Whistler is the perfect type of the great creative artist. I think of him as essentially modest. Asked by a foolish Attorney-General how he came to put £200 on a picture he could paint in a day, he replied: "Because it took me a lifetime to win to that mastery." The barrister who often got more for doing nothing found fault with the answer. He and the silly judge both agreed that the picture was not worth the money: this very picture, condemned

by Ruskin and jeered at by barrister, judge, and jury, has had an eventful history. It belonged at that time to Mr. Graham. A few years after, at his sale at Christie's it was knocked down amid hisses to a Mr. Harrison for sixty pounds. A little later still, at the close of the London Whistler Memorial Exhibition, it was bought for two thousand guineas by the National Arts Collection Fund, presented to the nation, and now hangs in the National Collection at the Tate Gallery. Surely, when they come to understanding the English will begin to honor the great creative artists and not the gnat critics and penguin professors.

OSCAR WILDE
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLIS & WALLERY, 1892

OSCAR WILDE

AS a result of nearly twenty years' friendship I have written a life of Oscar Wilde. The publishers of this book of "Portraits" wish me to sketch him here in a dozen pages. Replicas in art are unthinkable: even a hen cannot lay two eggs exactly alike; but I can take some pages from my book here and there, and so give some idea of the man and his excelling humor, though in such narrow limits I cannot trust myself to speak of his deeper self and tragic fate. Here is a snapshot, so to speak, with apologies to the reader, who will have to use imagination to stuff out the meagre outline.

. . . . . .

In the early eighties I met Oscar Wilde continually, now at the theatre, now in some society drawing-room; most often, I think, at Mrs. Jeune's (afterwards Lady St. Helier). His appearance was not in his favor; there was something oily and fat about him that repelled me. Of course, being very young I tried to give my repugnance a moral foundation; fleshly indulgence and laziness, I said to myself, were written all over him. The snatches of his monologues which I caught from time to time seemed

to me to consist chiefly of epigrams almost mechanically constructed of proverbs and familiar sayings turned upside down. One of Balzac's characters, it will be remembered, practised this form of humor. The desire to astonish and dazzle; the love of the uncommon for its own sake, were so evident that I shrugged my shoulders and avoided him. One evening, however, at Mrs. Jeune's, I got to know him better. At the very door Mrs. Jeune came up to me:

"Have you ever met Mr. Oscar Wilde? You ought to know him: he is so delightfully clever, so brilliant!"

I went with her and was formally introduced to him. He looked like a Roman Emperor of the decadence; he was over six feet in height, and both broad and thick-set. He shook hands in a limp way I disliked; his hands were flabby; greasy; his skin looked bilious and dirty. He had a trick which I noticed even then, which grew on him later, of pulling his jowl with his right hand as he spoke, and his jowl was already fat and pouchy. He wore a great green scarab ring on one finger. He was overdressed rather than well dressed; his clothes fitted him too tightly; he was too stout. His appearance filled me with distaste. I lay stress on this physical repulsion because I think most people felt it, and because it is a tribute to the fascination of

the man that he should have overcome the first impression so completely and so quickly. I don't remember what we talked about, but I noticed almost immediately that his grey eyes were finely expressive; in turn vivacious, laughing, sympathetic; always beautiful. The carven mouth, too, with its heavy, chiselled, almost colorless lips, had a certain charm in spite of a black front tooth which showed ignobly.

We had a certain interest in each other, an interest of curiosity, for I remember that he led the way almost immediately into the inner drawing-room, in order, as he said, to talk at ease in some seclusion. The conversation ended by my asking him to lunch next day.

At this time he was a superb talker, more brilliant than any I have ever heard in England, but nothing like what he became later in life. His talk soon made me forget his repellant physical peculiarities; indeed, I soon lost sight of them so completely that I have wondered since how I could have been so disagreeably affected by them. There was an extraordinary physical vivacity and geniality in the man, a winning charm in his gaiety, and lightning quick intelligence. His enthusiasms too were infectious. Every mental question interested him, especially if it had anything to do with art or literature. His whole face lit up as he spoke, and one saw nothing but his soulful eyes, heard nothing but his musical

tenor voice; he was indeed what the French call a *charmeur.*

. . . . . .

In the World's School. London, 1880-1884.

Before Oscar Wilde left Oxford he described himself as a "Professor of Æsthetics and Critic of Art." He had already dipped into his little patrimony to pay for his undergraduate trip to Greece and Italy with Mahaffy, and he could not conceal from himself that he would soon have to live on what he could earn by his pen in London—a few pounds a week. But then he was a poet, and had boundless confidence in his own ability. To the artist nature the present is everything; just for today he resolved that he would live as he had always lived; so he travelled first class to London and bought all the books and papers that could amuse or distract him: "Give me the luxuries," he used to say, "and anyone can have the necessaries."

Of course, in the background of his mind there were serious misgivings—ghosts that would not be laid. Long afterwards he told me that his father's death and the smallness of his patrimony had been a heavy blow to him. He encouraged himself, however, at the moment by dwelling on his brother's comparative success as a journalist in London, and waved aside fears and doubts as unworthy.

It is to his credit that at first he tried to cut down expenses and live laborious days. He took a couple of furnished rooms in Salisbury Street, off the Strand, a very Grub Street for a man of fashion, and began to work at journalism while getting together a book of poems for publication. His journalism at first was anything but successful. It was his misfortune to appeal only to the best heads, and good heads are not numerous anywhere. His appeal, too, was still academic and derivative. His brother Willie with his commoner sympathies appeared to be better equipped for this work. But Oscar had from the first a certain social success.

As soon as he reached London he stepped boldly into the limelight, going to all "first nights" and taking the floor on all occasions. He was not only an admirable talker, but he was invariably smiling, eager, full of life and the joy of living, and, above all, given to unmeasured praise of whatever and whoever pleased him. This gift of enthusiastic admiration was not only his most engaging characteristic, but also, perhaps, the chief evidence of his extraordinary ability. It was certainly, too, the quality which served him best all through his life. He went about declaring that Mrs. Langtry was more beautiful than the "Venus of Milo," and Lady Archie Campbell more charming than Rosalind, and Mr. Whistler an incomparable artist. Such enthusiasm in a young and brilliant man was unexpected and

delightful, and doors were thrown open to him in many sets. Those who praise passionately are generally welcome guests, and if Oscar could not praise he shrugged his shoulders and kept silent; scarcely a bitter word ever fell from those smiling lips. No tactics could have been more successful in England than his native gift of radiant good-humor and enthusiasm. He got to know not only all the actors and actresses, but the chief patrons and frequenters of the theatre: Lord Lytton, Lady Shrewsbury, Gladys, Lady Lonsdale (afterwards Lady de Grey), and Mrs. Jeune; and, on the other hand, Tennyson, Hardy, Meredith, Browning, Swinburne, and Matthew Arnold—all Bohemia, in fact, and all that part of Mayfair which cares for the things of the intellect.

But though he went out a great deal and met a great many distinguished people, and won a certain popularity, his social success put no money in his purse. It even forced him to spend money; for the constant applause of his hearers gave him self-confidence. He began to talk more and write less, and cabs and gloves and flowers cost money. He was soon compelled to mortgage his little property in Ireland.

At the same time, he was still nobly intent on bettering his mind, and in London he found far wiser teachers than in Oxford, Matthew Arnold, and Morris, and in especial Whistler. Morris and

Arnold, though greatly overestimated during their lives, had hardly any message for the men of their own time. Morris went for his ideals to an imaginary past, and what he taught and praised was often totally unsuited to modern conditions. Arnold was an academic critic and dilettante poet, his views of life those of the snobbish goody-goody schoolmaster, his influence a scholarly and cloistered influence, an evil influence for Oscar Wilde confirming his bookish bias. Whistler, on the other hand, was a student of life, a master of ironic persiflage, and a great artist to boot: he had not only assimilated much of the newest thought of the time, but with the alchemy of genius had transmuted it and made it his own. He was, indeed, worth listening to.

Oscar sat at his feet and assimilated as much as he could of the new æsthetic gospel. He even ventured to annex some of the master's theories and telling stories, and thus came into conflict with his teacher.

Everyone must remember one instance of this and Whistler's use of it. The art critic of *The Times* had come to see an exhibition of Whistler's pictures. Filled with an undue sense of his own importance he buttonholed the master and pointing to one picture said: "That's good, first-rate, a lovely bit of color; but that, you know," he went on, jerking his finger over his shoulder at another picture; "that's bad, drawing all wrong . . . bad!"

"My dear fellow," cried Whistler, "you must

never say that that painting's good or that bad, never! Good and bad are not terms to be used by you; but say, I like this, and I dislike that, and you'll be within your right. And now come and have a whiskey for you're sure to like that."

Carried away by the witty fling, Oscar cried:

"I wish I had said that."

"You will, Oscar, you will," came Whistler's lightning thrust.

Of all the personal influences which went to the moulding of Oscar Wilde's talent, that of Whistler was by far the most important; Whistler taught him the value of wit and the power a consciousness of genius and a knowledge of men lend to the artist, taught him, too, that singularity of appearance counts doubly in a democracy of clothes. But neither his own talent, nor the stories and ideas he borrowed from Whistler helped him to earn money: the conquest of London seemed further off and more improbable than ever. Where a Whistler had failed to win, how could he, or indeed anyone, be sure of success?

A weaker professor of æsthetics would have been discouraged by the monetary and other difficulties of his position, and would have lost heart at the outset before the impenetrable blank wall of English philistinism and contempt. But Oscar Wilde was conscious of great ability and was driven by an inordinate vanity. Instead of diminishing his pre-

tensions in the face of opposition, he increased them. He began to go abroad in the evening in knee breeches and silk stockings, wearing strange flowers in his coat—green carnations and gilded lilies—while talking about Baudelaire, whose name even was unfamiliar, as a world poet, and proclaiming the strange creed that "nothing succeeds like excess." Very soon his name was in every one's mouth, fashionable London talked of him and discussed him at a thousand tea-tables. For one invitation he had received before, he now received a dozen; he became a celebrity.

Of course, he was still sneered at by the many as a mere *poseur;* it still seemed to be all Lombard Street to a china orange that he would be beaten down under the myriad trampling feet of English indifference and contempt.

But if the artistic movement was laughed at and scorned by the many as a craze, a select few stood firm, and soon the steadfast minority began to sway the majority, as is usually the case. Oscar Wilde became the prophet of an esoteric cult. But notoriety even did not solve the monetary question, which grew more and more insistent. A dozen times he waved it aside and went into debt rather than restrain himself. Somehow or other he would fall on his feet, he thought. Men who console themselves in this way usually fall on some one else's feet, and so did Oscar Wilde. At twenty-six years of

age, and, curiously enough, at the very moment of his insolent-bold challenge of the world with fantastic dress, he had to borrow from his mother and a little later was fain to sell his small patrimony in order to meet the most pressing necessities; but the difficulty was only postponed; what was to be done?

Even as a young man Oscar had a certain understanding of life. He could not make his way as a journalist, but he might as a lecturer; he knew in his heart that he could talk, better than he could write and there was a lot of money in a successful lecture tour. But for the moment he put off this new adventure, having persuaded himself that his book of poems would make him famous and perhaps rich. He had used all his cleverness on the book; he had written sonnets in it to Miss Ellen Terry and other notable persons; they would surely talk about the book and buy copies and get their friends also to buy. His calculation was not mistaken: the book went into four editions in as many weeks and brought in some two or three hundred pounds—tenfold more than Keats's first book. There was a bitter in the sweet, however; the critics would not have him at any price: *The Times, The Saturday Review, Punch* —the bigwigs declared unanimously that his poems were mere echoes and furnished striking proof of their assertions. Oscar Wilde, they all concluded, was anything you like; but not a poet.

In face of the condemnation of the critics Oscar

acted at once: he got his brother Willie to announce in *The World* that the unexampled success of the poems had brought Oscar Wilde an offer from the famous impresario, Major Pond, to lecture in the States, and incontinently he betook himself to New York.

On landing he boldly challenged Fortune again by telling the custom officials that he had nothing to declare but his genius. The phrase caught the public fancy and his first lecture in Chickering Hall brought together so distinguished an audience that an impresario volunteered his services and Oscar began his tour under the best auspices. His subjects were "The English Renaissance" and "The House Beautiful." He had what the French call a *succes de scandale*—a success of notoriety in America, but nothing more. People went to see his old-world attire rather than to hear him. One is fain to confess today that his lectures make very poor reading. There is not a new thought in them; not even a memorable expression; though now and then a gleam of humor, an unexpected bird-like flirt of wing and quick change of direction are diverting. The lectures were a half-success. He made some money by them, repaid his mother, and spread his name abroad. But the cash result was not conclusive. In a year or so we find him again in England; grown a little wiser.

. . . . . .

It is greatly to his credit that he did not settle down in London. Whistler had studied in Paris, so Oscar went there, too, using the money he had made in America to better his culture. In a few months he learned a great deal of French and got to know most of the younger French writers. On his return he talked of Verlaine as familiarly and admiringly as he had formerly talked of Baudelaire.

Before going to France he had lectured in London to the Art Students of the Royal Academy on art and thereby excited Whistler's anger. Whistler asserted that Oscar had begged him for assistance in composing this address; he had imparted some simple, necessary truths and from a gentleman had naturally looked for the usual acknowledgment. But Oscar had coolly appropriated his ideas, flaunted his feathers and had omitted to give his master the credit. There can be no doubt that Whistler's complaint, though over-shrill and passionate, was justified: whoever compares Oscar's lecture on "The English Renaissance of Art" with his lecture to the Art Students will have to recognize a change of front. Such phrases as "artists are not to copy beauty but to create it . . . a picture is a purely decorative thing," proclaim their author. Oscar himself, when questioned, admitted that there was some truth in Whistler's contention. The newspaper dispute between the two was brought to a head in 1885, when Whistler gave his famous *Ten o'clock*

lecture on Art: Whistler's lecture was infinitely better than any of Oscar Wilde's. Twenty odd years older than Wilde, Whistler was a master of all his resources: he was not only witty, but he had new views on art and original ideas. As a great artist he knew that "there never was an artistic period. There never was an Art-loving nation."

Again and again, too, he reached pure beauty of feeling and expression. I thought the lecture masterly, the best ever heard in London, and I said so loudly enough. To my astonishment Oscar would not admit the superlative quality of Whistler's talk: he thought the message paradoxical and the ridicule of the professors too bitter. "Whistler's like a wasp," he cried, "and carries about with him a poisoned sting." Oscar's kindly sweet nature revolted against the bitter aggressiveness of Whistler's attitude. Besides, in essence, Whistler's lecture was an attack on the academic theory taught in the universities, and defended naturally by a young scholar like Oscar Wilde. Whistler's view that the artist was sporadic, a happy chance, a "sport," in fact, even in 1885, was a new view, and Oscar was not on this level; he reviewed the master in the *Pall Mall Gazette,* a review remarkable for one of the earliest gleams of that genial humor which later became his most characteristic gift: "Whistler," he said, "is indeed one of the very greatest masters of painting in

my opinion. And I may add that in this opinion Mr. Whistler himself entirely concurs."

Whistler retorted in *The World* and Oscar replied, but Whistler had altogether the best of the argument.

A little later we had Whistler's famous and bitter summing up. . . . "What has Oscar in common with Art? except that he dines at our tables and picks from our platters the plums for the pudding he peddles in the provinces. . . . Oscar—the amiable, irresponsible, esurient Oscar—with no more sense of a picture than of the fit of a coat, has the courage of the opinions . . . of others!"

Oscar Wilde learned almost all he knew of art and of controversy from Whistler, but he was never more than a pupil in either field; for controversy especially, he was poorly equipped: he had neither the courage, nor the bitterness, nor the joy in conflict of his great exemplar. It was only his geniality and high intelligence which saved him from becoming as manifest a butt as Mr. Sidney Colvin or poor 'Arry Quilter.

Ten years later he had become as witty as his master, and a thousand times more humorous, but even then he was a wretched fighter, too kindly ever to be a good disputant.

. . . . . .

Very soon after meeting Oscar Wilde for the first time I confessed to myself that I liked him;

his talk was intensely quickening. He had something unexpected to say on almost every subject. His mind was agile and powerful, and he took delight in using it. He was well read, too, in several languages, especially in French, and his excellent memory stood him in good stead. Even when he merely repeated what the great ones had said perfectly, he added a new coloring. And already his characteristic humor was beginning to illumine every topic with lambent flashes.

The first time we lunched together he told me that he had been asked by Harper's to write a book of one hundred thousand words and offered a large sum for it—I think some five thousand dollars—in advance. He wrote to them gravely that he did not know one hundred thousand words in English, so could not undertake the work, and he laughed merrily like a child at the cheeky reproof.

"I have sent their letters and my reply to the Press," he added, and laughed again, probing me with inquisitive eyes: how far did I understand that self-advertisement was a necessity, notoriety a short-cut to fame?

About this time an impromptu of his moved the town to laughter. At some dinner-party it appeared the ladies sat a little too long; Oscar wanted to smoke. Suddenly the hostess drew his attention to a candle on his left:

"Please put it out, Mr. Wilde," she said, "it's smoking."

Oscar turned to do as he was told with the remark: "Happy candle!"

The delightful impertinence had an extraordinary success. . . .

Early in our friendship I was forced to see that his love of the uncommon, his paradoxes and epigrams were natural to him, sprang immediately from his nature and temperament. Perhaps it would be well to define once for all his attitude towards life with more scope and particularity than I have hitherto done. It is often supposed that he had no clear and coherent view of life, no belief, no faith to guide his vagrant footsteps; but such an opinion does him an injustice. He had his own philosophy, and held to it for long years with astonishing tenacity. His attitude towards life can best be seen if he be held up against Goethe. He took the artistic view of life which Goethe had first stated, and, indeed, in youth had overstated with an astonishing persuasiveness: "the beautiful is more than the good," said Goethe; "for it includes the good."

It seemed to Oscar, as it had seemed to young Goethe, that "the extraordinary alone survives"; the extraordinary whether good or bad; he therefore sought after the extraordinary, and naturally enough often fell into extravagance. But how stimulating it was in London, where sordid platitudes drip and

drizzle all day long, to hear some one talking brilliant paradoxes. Oscar's appeal to the artistic intelligence was as quickening as sunshine.

Goethe did not linger long in the half-way house of unbelief; the murderer, he saw, may win notoriety as easily as the martyr, but the memory of him will not be cherished. "*The fashion of this world passeth away,*" said the great German, "I would fain occupy myself with that which endures."

Midway on life's road Goethe accepted Kant's moral imperative and restated his creed: "A man must resolve to live," he said, "not only for the Good and Beautiful, but for the Common Weal."

Oscar did not push his thought into such transcendental regions.

It was a pity, I often felt, that he had not studied German as thoroughly as French; Goethe might have done more for him than Verlaine or Balzac, for in spite of some stodgy German faults Goethe is the best guide through the mysteries of life that the modern world has yet produced. Oscar Wilde stopped where the religion of Goethe began; he was as obstinate a pagan and individualist as Goethe had been in youth; he lived for the beautiful and extraordinary, but not for the Good, and still less for the Whole; he acknowledged no moral obligation; *in commune bonis* was an ideal which never said anything to him; he cared nothing for the common good; he held himself above the mass of the

people with an Englishman's extravagant insularity and aggressive pride. Politics, religion—everything interested him simply as a subject of art; life itself was merely material for art. In fine he had taken Whistler's position, the position most natural to an artist.

The view was astounding in England, and new everywhere in its onesidedness. Its passionate exaggeration, however, was quickening, and there is, of course, something to be said for it. The artistic view of life is often higher than the ordinary religious view; at least it does not deal in condemnations and exclusions; it is more reasonable, more catholic, more finely perceptive.

"The artist's view of life is the only possible one," Oscar used to say, "and should be applied to everything, most of all to religion and morality. Cavaliers and Puritans are interesting for their costumes and not for their convictions."

"There is no such thing as morality; for there is no general rule of spiritual health; it is all personal, individual. . . . I only demand that freedom which I willingly concede to others. No one condemns another for preferring green to gold. Why should any taste be condemned? Liking and disliking are not under our control. I want to choose the nourishment which suits *my* body and *my* soul."

I can almost hear him say the words with his charming humorous smile and exquisite flash of

deprecation, as if he were half inclined to make fun of his own creed.

It was not his views on art, however, which recommended him to the aristocratic set in London; but his contempt for social reform, or rather his utter indifference to it, and his English love of inequality. He never took sufficient interest in politics to state his position clearly or strongly, but his prejudices were the prejudices of the English governing class and were all in favor of individual freedom, or anarchy under the protection of the policeman.

"The poor are poor creatures," he used to say, "and must always be hewers of wood and drawers of water. They are really the dunghill out of which men of genius and artists grow like flowers. Their function is to give birth to genius and nourish it. They have no other *raison d'être.* Were men as intelligent as bees, all gifted individuals would be supported by the community, as the bees support their queen. We should be the first charge on the State, just as Socrates declared that he ought to be kept in the Prytanœum at the public expense.

"Don't talk to me, Frank, about the hardships of the poor. The hardships of the poor are necessities, but talk to me of the hardships of men of genius, and I could weep tears of blood. I was never so affected by any book in my life as I was by the sordid misery of Balzac's poet, Eugène de Rubempré."

Naturally this creed of an exaggerated individualism appealed peculiarly to the best set in London. It was eminently aristocratic.

1898: After the Downfall

The more I thought the matter over, the more clearly I saw that the only chance of salvation for Oscar was to get him to work, to give him some purpose in life, and the reader should remember here that at this time I had not seen *De Profundis,* and did not know that while in prison Oscar had himself recognized this necessity. After all, I said to myself, nothing is lost if he will only begin to write. A man should be able to whistle happiness and hope down the wind and take despair to his bed and heart, and win courage from his harsh companion. Happiness is no good to the artist: happiness never creates anything but memories. . . . If Oscar would work and not brood over the dead past; but let it bury itself, he might yet come to soul-health and achievement. He could win back everything; his own respect, and the respect of his fellows, if indeed that were worth winning. After all, an artist must have at least the self-abnegation of the hero, and heroic resolution to strive and strive, or he will never bring it far even in his art. If I could only get Oscar to work, it seemed to me everything might yet come right. I spent a week with him,

lunching and dining and putting all this before him in every way.

I noticed that he enjoyed the good eating and the good drinking as intensely as ever. He was even drinking too much I thought, and was beginning to get stout and flabby again, but the good living was a necessity to him, and it certainly did not prevent him from talking charmingly. He was getting very deaf, and on that account fell into unusual drifts of silence, but the pauses seemed to set off the brilliance of his talk: his monologues were more interesting than ever, his humor richer and more pervasive. For hours together he would keep his hearers smiling delightedly, interested in all he said, exquisitely amused by the happy verbal radiance playing over his rhythmic speech. He would frequently begin with some little story, or apologue, and then toss witty nothings about like a conjuror playing with colored balls, always ready to seize on the first remark and illumine it with a novel significance, or make it the reason for relating some new and interesting experience. Other men may have talked as well, but surely no one has ever had such wealth of verbal humor. Dozens of the winged words of today were of his coining on the spur of the moment: "Thick as thieves in Vallombrosa"; "The woman who hesitates is won"; "Familiarity breeds consent"; unexpected flirts of gay insight.

I perpetually praised these performances in order

to induce him to write: but as soon as I brought up the subject he would shake his head gloomily:

"Oh, Frank, I cannot, you know my rooms; how could I write there? A horrid bedroom like a closet, and a little sitting-room without air or outlook. Books everywhere; and no place to write; to tell the truth, I cannot even read in it. No artist could write in such sordid misery."

Again and again he came back to this. He harped upon his poverty, so that I could not but see purpose in it. He was already cunning in the art of getting money without asking for it. My heart ached for him; one goes down hill with such fatal speed and ease, and the mire at the foot is so loathsome.

"You ought to work, Oscar. After all, why should anyone help you, if you will not help yourself? If I cannot assist you to save yourself, I am only doing you harm."

"A base sophism, Frank, mere hypocrisy, as you know: the fatted calf is better than husks for any man."

"You could easily win thousands and live like a prince again. Why not make the effort?"

"It is harder than you think, Frank. If I had pleasant sunny rooms I'd try. . . . It's harder than you think."

"Nonsense, it's easy for you. Your punishment has made your name known in every country in the world. A book of yours would sell like wildfire; a

play of yours would draw in any capital. You might live here like a prince. Shakespeare lost love and friendship, hope and health to boot—everything, and yet forced himself to write *The Tempest.* Why can't you?"

"I'll try, Frank, I'll try."

I may just mention here that any praise of what others had done, moved Oscar to emulation. He always compared himself to the greatest. In one of my articles on Shakespeare in *The Saturday Review,* in 1896, I declared that no one had ever given completer record of himself than Shakespeare: "We know him better than we know any of our contemporaries," I wrote, "and he is better worth knowing." When this appeared Oscar wrote to me praising the article; but condemning the phrase.

"Frank, Frank, you have forgotten me," were his words, "surely I am better worth knowing than Shakespeare."

I did not agree with him, but it didn't matter. I had to go back to England, but I crossed to Paris early in the summer, and found he had written nothing.

I often talked with him about it; but now he changed his ground a little.

"I can't write, Frank. When I take up my pen all the past comes back: I cannot bear my thoughts . . . regret and remorse, like twin dogs, wait to seize me at any idle moment. I must go out and

watch life; amuse and interest myself, or I should go mad. . . . You don't know how sore it is about my heart as soon as I am alone. I am face to face with my own soul: the Oscar of five years ago, with his beautiful secure life and his glorious easy triumphs, comes up before me, and I cannot stand the contrast. . . . My eyes burn with tears. If you care for me you will not ask me to write."

"You promised to try," I said, somewhat harshly, "and I want you to try. You haven't suffered more than Dante suffered in exile and poverty; a man as proud as Lucifer forced to be a parasite; yet you know if he had suffered ten times as much he would have written it all down. Tears, indeed! the fire in his eyes would have dried the tears."

"True enough, Frank, but don't you see that Dante was all of one piece? I am at war with myself. I was born to sing the joy and pride of life, the pleasure of living, the delight in everything beautiful in this most beautiful world, and they took me and tortured me till I learned sorrow and pity. Now I cannot sing the joy, Frank, because I know the suffering and I was never made to sing of suffering. I hate it and I want to sing the love-songs of joy and delight. It is joy alone which appeals to my soul. The joy of life and beauty and love—I could sing the song of Apollo the Sun-God, and they try to force me to sing the lament of the tortured Marsyas. . . ."

This to me was his true and final confession. His second fall after leaving prison had put him "at war with himself." That is, I think, the heart of truth about him; the song of sorrow, of pity and renunciation was not his song, and the experience of suffering prevented the great pagan from singing the delight of life and his joy in beauty. It never seemed to occur to him that he should stand with one foot on self-indulgence and with the other on renunciation, and reach a faith which should include both in a completer acceptance of life.

In spite of his sunny nature he had a certain amount of jealousy and envy in him which was always brought to light by the popular success of those whom he had known and measured. I remember his telling me once that he wrote his first play because he was annoyed at the way Pinero was being praised. "Pinero, who can't write at all: he can make plots and scenes and nothing else. His characters are made of dough: and never was there such a worthless style, or rather such a complete absence of style: he writes like a grocer's assistant."

I noticed now that this trait of jealousy was stronger in him than ever. One day I threw him an English illustrated paper which I had bought on my way to lunch. It contained a picture of Lord Curzon as Viceroy of India. He was photographed in a carriage with his wife by his side: the State carriage drawn by four horses, with outriders, and es-

corted by cavalry and cheering crowds—all the paraphernalia and pomp of imperial power.

"Do you see that, Frank?" Oscar cried; "fancy George Curzon being treated like that. I knew him well; a more perfect example of plodding mediocrity was never seen in the world. He had never a thought or phrase above the common . . ."

. . . . . .

"Now George Curzon plays king in India: Wyndham is a Secretary of State, and I'm hiding in shame and poverty here in Paris, an exile and outcast. Do you wonder that I cannot write, Frank? The dreadful injustice of life maddens me. After all, what have they done in comparison with what I have done?

"Close the eyes of all of us now and fifty years hence, or a hundred years hence, no one will know anything about the Curzons, or the Wyndhams: whether they lived or died will be a matter of indifference to every one; but my comedies and my stories and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* will be known and read by millions, and even my unhappy fate will call forth world-wide sympathy."

"That's your real reward, Oscar, an exceeding great reward; that's what you have labored for, fame and sympathy when you are dead, a longer breath of life than other men can hope to enjoy, and that is why you should write now. Go on, do more, and do it better."

"Oh, Frank, it's impossible, impossible for me to work under these disgraceful conditions."

"But you can have better conditions now and more money as you want it if you'll begin to work."

He shook his head despairingly. Again and again I tried, but again and again failed to move him to any effort. At last one day I said to him:

"The only thing that will make you write, Oscar, is absolute, blank poverty. That's the sharpest spur after all—necessity."

"You don't know me, Frank," he replied tartly. "I would kill myself. I can endure to the end; but to be absolutely destitute would show me that suicide is the open door."

Suddenly his depressed manner changed and his whole face lighted up:

"Isn't it comic, Frank, the way the English talk of the 'open door' while their doors are always locked and barred and bolted, even their church doors? Yet it is not hypocrisy in them; they simply cannot see themselves as they are; they have no imagination."

There was a long pause, and then he went on gravely:

"Suicide, Frank, is always the temptation of the unfortunate, a great temptation."

"Suicide is the natural end of the world-weary," I replied, "but you enjoy life intensely. For you to talk of suicide is ridiculous."

"Do you know that my wife is dead?"

"I had heard it," I replied.

"My way back to hope and a new life ends in her grave," he went on. "Everything that happens to me is symbolic and irrevocable."

He spoke, I thought, with a certain grave conviction.

"The great tragedies of the world are all final and complete; Socrates would not escape death, though Crito opened the prison door for him. I could not avoid prison, though you showed me the way to safety. Some of us are fated to suffer, don't you think? as an example to humanity—'an echo and a light unto eternity.' "

"I think it would be finer, instead of taking the punishment lying down, to trample it beneath your feet, and make it a rung of the ladder."

"Oh, Frank, you would turn all the tragedies into triumphs, that is the fighter in you."

"Nonsense," I cried, "you love life as much as ever you did; more than anyone I have ever seen."

"It is true," he cried, his face lighting up again, "more than anyone. Life delights me. The people passing on the boulevards, the play of the sunshine in the trees; the vibrating noise, the quick movement of the cabs, the costumes of the *cochers* and *sergents-de-ville*, kings and beggars, princesses and prostitutes all please me to the soul, charm me, and if you

will only let me talk instead of bothering me to write I shall be quite happy. Why should I write any more? I have done enough for fame. . . .

"I will tell you a story, Frank," he broke off, and he told me a slight thing about Judas. The little tale was told delightfully, with eloquent inflections of voice and still more eloquent pauses.

. . . . . .

"The end of all this is," I said, before going back to London, "the end of all this is, that you will not write?"

"No, no, Frank," he said, "that I cannot write under these conditions. If I had money enough; if I could shake off Paris and forget those awful rooms of mine and get to the Riviera for the winter and live in some seaside village of the Latins or Etrurians with the wine-colored sea at my feet, and the blue sky above, and the scent of rosemary and myrtle at my nostrils, and God's sunlight about me and no care for money, then I would write as naturally as a bird sings, because one is happy and cannot help it. . . ."

But when the occasion was given him, and he spent a whole winter on the Riviera, he composed nothing more than a couple of verses of a ballad on *A Fisher Boy,* verses which were never even written down.

. . . . . .

The will to live had almost left him: so long as he could live pleasantly and without effort he was

content; but as soon as ill-health came or pain, or even discomfort, he grew impatient for deliverance.

One day when out driving in the last months Ross remonstrated with him for stopping too frequently to drink:

"You know you shouldn't, Oscar; the doctors said you shouldn't; it is poison to you."

For one moment the sad eyes held him:

"Why not, Bobbie? What have I to live for?" And his best friend could only bow his head.

But to the last he kept his joyous humor and charming gaiety. His disease brought with it a certain irritation of the skin, annoying rather than painful. Meeting this same friend after some weeks of separation he wanted to apologize for scratching himself:

"Really," he exclaimed, "I'm more like a great ape than ever; but I hope you'll give me a lunch, Bobbie, and not a nut."

At the very last, he asked for champagne and when it was brought declared that he was "dying beyond his means"—his happy humor lighting up even his death-bed.

JOHN DAVIDSON
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY J. RUSSELL & SONS

JOHN DAVIDSON: AD MEMORIAM

IT was in 1890 that I first met John Davidson: he had sent *The Ballad of the Nun* to me for publication in *The Fortnightly Review*. I read the poem, as indeed I read every contribution in those early days, hoping it was a masterpiece, and this time I was not disappointed. I can still recall the thrill of these verses:

> The adventurous sun took heaven by storm;
> Clouds scattered largesses of rain;
> The sounding cities, rich and warm,
> Smouldered and glittered in the plain.
>
> Sometimes it was a wandering wind,
> Sometimes the fragrance of the pine,
> Sometimes the thought how others sinned,
> That turned her sweet blood into wine.
>
> Sometimes she heard a serenade
> Complaining sweetly far away:
> She said, "A young man woos a maid";
> And dreamt of love till break of day.
>
> . . . . . .

For still night's starry scroll unfurled,
And still the day came like a flood:
It was the greatness of the world
That made her long to use her blood.

Naturally I was eager to meet such a singer: I wrote to him, telling him of the joy his ballad had given me, and hoped that he would call when he had nothing better to do. A day or two later he came, and I took to him at first sight. He was a little below middle height, but strongly built with square shoulders and remarkably fine face and head: the features were almost classically regular, the eyes dark brown and large, the forehead high, the hair, moustache and small "Imperial" as black as jet: he carried a monocle, was always well-dressed and looked like a handsome Frenchman. His manners were perfectly frank and natural: he met every one in the same unaffected, kindly, human way: I never saw a trace in him of snobbishness or incivility. Possibly a great man, I said to myself, certainly a man of genius, for simplicity of manner alone is in England almost a proof of extraordinary endowment. I soon noticed one little peculiarity in Davidson, which I afterwards remarked in other poets: his enunciation was exceptionally distinct: every word had its value to him, each syllable its weight.

I met him with a slight embarrassment. Though I was editor of the review, the managing director,

Mr. Frederic Chapman, expected to be consulted before any abnormal expense was incurred or any extraordinary article accepted. In my elation I had laid *The Ballad of the Nun* before him and hoped he would allow me to pay £50 for it. To my astonishment he scouted the idea: "poetry didn't pay," he assured me, "never had paid, never would pay; a fiver was plenty to give for any poem: all poets were hard up . . . five pounds would buy the best any of them could do."

It was no use trying to alter his opinion. I had scarcely made up my mind to plead poverty to Davidson when Chapman came to my room and begged me not to publish the poem on any account: he had read the verses I had praised and he thought them disgustingly licentious. In vain I argued and quoted: I was up against the tradesman's view of art, and an English tradesman at that. There was nothing to be done but accept the brainless decision or throw up my post. I had to be taught that to edit a review in London is not to be a priest in the Temple of the Spirit, but the shopman pander to a childish public with an insatiable appetite for whatever is conventional and commonplace.

Davidson made such a good impression on me that I told him the truth: the poem would have its place in English literature, but my directors would not publish it. He took the disappointment perfectly, confessed that he would have liked the ballad to ap-

pear in *The Fortnightly;* adding handsomely that my appreciation of it was sufficient compensation, and so forth.

From that time on we were friends, and met half a dozen times every season as one meets friends in London. Such of our meetings as marked rings of growth in our intimacy I shall find a mournful pleasure in recalling here, for long before the tragic end Davidson had become dear to me.

The growth of friendship like the growth of love in my experience proceeds often by leaps and bounds and not by gradual, imperceptible accretions as the young are apt to imagine. Like love, friendship has to be won, is indeed also a twin flower of desire and conquest. I accuse myself now of taking Davidson's friendship too much for granted; but it seemed valuable to me from the first, and I tried to introduce him to people who might have been of use to him. He was unwilling to come out of his shell, not from shyness, but pride.

Once, however, I succeeded.

I took him to a house at Wimbledon where his poetry was already known and loved. As soon as Davidson found he was among friends and admirers who could appreciate his work, he let himself go with the ingenuousness of a boy. He recited passages that he liked in his own work or the work of others, and, of course, one noticed immediately that he had an extraordinary knowledge of the best English

poetry. Like most poets, he chanted his lines, marking the metre of the verse a little too distinctly; but there was a certain impressiveness in the peculiarity. And how sincere he was and how enthusiastic when repeating the verses he loved: one could hear thrilling across the rhythm his intimate understanding and generous admiration. It was in this spirit he quoted something of Burns, whom I had been running down just to see if his patriotism would revolt. He had no conscious local vanity, and he recognized certain of Burns's limitations, but, as a Scot, he could not help overrating him.

Again and again on this occasion Davidson complained of his memory; but the listeners had reason to wonder at its fidelity. He complained, too, as I often heard him complain afterwards, of his fumbling speech. "With a pen in hand I am articulate," he cried, "but my tongue's a poor instrument." It was, in fact, a very good instrument, though doubtless his pen was better.

It is only in his books that the creative artist can reveal his peculiar gift; in conversation, however intimate, he seldom is able to show more than the intellectual or critical side of his talent. This analytic critical faculty is only the obverse of the synthetic creative power, and whatever shortcomings there are in the one can usually be traced in the other. Goethe overpraised honest mediocrities because there was such heavy German paste in him

that he could enjoy drivel and produce deserts of dullness such as ensure oblivion to the *Wanderjahre.* I felt pretty sure that Davidson would not give me ready-made or popular judgments; as an original poet he would have his own creed, a new canon. And a most original critic he showed himself, as I had expected.

What appeared at first to be a freakish sincerity marked all his literary judgments; most of his preferences were based on reason, though the reason didn't always seem adequate. This tantalizing unexpectedness was, of course, the tap-root of his genius, the proof of his originality. Let me recall some of his judgments. He declared that " 'The Song of the Shirt' was the most important English poem of the nineteenth century: 'The woman in unwomanly rags plying her needle and thread' was of the very stuff of great poetry." And James Thomson in natural endowment was the first English poet of his time, high throned among the Immortals. Tennyson, on the other hand, was only a master-craftsman, both he and Browning mere bourgeois optimists. Burns could *see,* he said, and Blake had vision at times, and Wordsworth profoundly; Swinburne was nothing but an amorist.

Davidson's reverence was all for the spirit and not the letter, sincerity to him was the hall-mark of genius. Among the living Meredith was "our foremost man of letters," while Yeats was only "the

seer of the twilight, the singer of 'pearl-pale' fingers and 'dove-grey' seaboards," and Shaw hardly more than a "humorist." His appreciation of form as became a poet was wellnigh perfect, but all his admiration even in those early days went to the teachers and not to the singers.

Gradually we won Davidson to speak of himself: he had come, he said, of Scotch peasant stock: put his thick strong hands with short spatulated fingers forward as evidence of his workman origin—"the mark of the ploughman," he called them. And then he spoke of the delicacy of constitution shown in his relatively thin neck; one would think, he said, that a thick neck would show a brain well fed with large blood vessels; as a matter of fact, it's always a sign of exorbitant animalism. I had noticed his comparatively thin neck, too, and mentioned that it usually went with other signs of delicacy, such as fine silky thick hair: but Davidson contended that his hair was not fine and not thick, and when he saw me unconvinced he suddenly put up his hand and in a twinkling plucked off a "transformation" and discovered an astonishing dome of bald forehead. We couldn't help laughing, and I asked him why he wore such a thing. "I was prematurely bald," he said, "and a little ashamed of looking so old; now I'm thinking of leaving my head as it is; but the flies annoy me, and so I put off the decision." A few years later he doffed the disguise finally, and I think his

appearance was improved thereby, for his forehead was remarkable—domed like Swinburne's and Shakespeare's.

Thinking over my first long talks with Davidson I came to the conclusion that, having sprung from the people and suffered a good deal from poverty, he gave undue importance to the condition of the laboring class and the poor without sufficient sympathy with the intellectuals who deserve more help and are still worse off. Besides, he was a little influenced by the undeserved neglect shown to his own works. He had a passionate admiration for all the great spirits of the past, and even for the really great of his own generation: but he was apt to be unjust to the lesser lights of the time who for some reason or other had achieved popularity.

He could not stand Henley, for instance, and spoke of him disdainfully: said laughingly: "I wrote a couplet on him once because he's always sheltering himself behind Byron to depreciate contemporaries more important than his idol:

> Behind the gallant verse, the gallant prose;
> A little soul: its finger to its nose.

"You remember," he added, "how Lamb called Wordsworth 'the Beadle of Parnassus'—good? isn't it? We don't want beadles!"

"Excellent," I cried, "I hadn't heard it before.

My judgment of Henley," I went on, "is as disdainful as yours: I always called him Pistol *Redivivus*. You remember his verse:

> It matters not how straight the gate,
> How charged with punishment the scroll,
> I am the Master of my fate,
> I am the Captain of my Soul."

"It does, indeed, deserve to be called 'The Swan Song of Pistol!'" cried Davidson.

"Yet one couldn't help pitying him," I rejoined, "with his splendid torso and leonine head, and those terrible, twisted legs."

"Why 'pity'?" replied Davidson; "after all, it was his own fault. If a man will take brainless risks, he has only himself to blame for the inevitable consequences."

I thought this a hard saying.

"You would not exclude pity," I cried: "thank God! we don't all get punished according to our transgressions. The world would be a dreadful place if Justice reigned: which of us would escape whipping?"

"I don't agree," cried Davidson, with a Scotch love of argument and a certain personal bitterness in the tone; "I only want justice, nothing more, nothing less. Do you remember the astonishing lines? I think them as fine as anything of Shakespeare:

> This toils my body, this consumeth age,
> That only I to all men just must be,
> And neither gods nor men be just to me.

"A cry from the inmost heart—eh?"

I nodded, for I knew *The Spanish Tragedy,* and Davidson went on:

"See how Stephen Phillips is being puffed into popularity by the academic critics, the Sidney Colvins and other such nonentities: it irritates and disgusts me."

"Some of his dramatic stuff," I chimed in, "is indeed uninspired enough to be popular."

"You should print my verse about him as a corrective," cried Davidson, and he recited merrily:

> Because our Homer sometimes nods
> The Ancient Bard who went before,
> Is that a reason, oh, ye Gods,
> Should Stephen Phillips always snore?

"His *Paolo and Francesca* seems to me a beautiful love-duet," I said, "not nearly so fine as *Romeo and Juliet,* but still in its own way delightful and interesting."

"No Mercutio, no Nurse; nothing objective in it," cried Davidson, "a mere lyric of love."

I could not accept his judgment, and to find out just where he stood I said something in praise of

Dowson. Davidson was a little unfair to him, too, I thought.

"I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion," strikes a note that always vibrates in me: but he would not have it.

"One swallow does not make a summer," he cried, "nor one poem a poet: a poet is a sacred singer, not a sort of mechanical toy with only one tune in its throat." (He appeared to forget that this canon ruled out his favorite, Hood.)

While admitting whatever force there was in his contention, I insisted that all artists today, especially all poets and writers in England, were lamentably underpaid and misesteemed.

"Don't for God's sake let us grudge any of them such popularity as they may win. They'll never get enough appreciation of any sort to make up for their trials. . . .

"No writer in England should ever dispute the justice of the reward given to any of our clan: we should all exalt our work like actors do, and try to get more for it, but never depreciate another of the tribe. By holding together we shall the sooner come into our kingdom."

Davidson, I believe, did not realize fully what I was driving at; nor did I care to push my theories on him, being more intent at the moment on getting a fair mental portrait of him.

It was his sincerity which struck me most at the

outset; three or four years later he showed me that his unswerving loyalty to truth was an even deeper characteristic and had brought him to many-sided wisdom. He saw his own people with the unflinching direct vision which Dante turned on his Florentines.

"The English," he said one day, "from the peer to the prentice, are the middle-class of Europe, the prosperous pushing shopwalkers of the world."

Napoleon saw it first, but Davidson realized the truth a little more completely.

Davidson was probably the first to declare that "the modern scientific spirit in literature, the resolve to see things as they are, and say what we are relentlessly is a great mood. The mood in which men and women wish to be and be known, as they are, to respect and be respected, to love and be loved simply for what they are, is the greatest mood for hundreds of years."

Such a view proves by itself that Davidson had real insight, and his judgments were usually sane enough if his point of view were taken into account. This fairness of judgment, however, never excluded a love of whimsical overstatement. Once in a combative mood he asserted that one good poem was worth a dozen short stories. I didn't feel inclined to treat the absurdity seriously; but he persisted, gravely assuming that the survival of Homer's poetry proved its superiority over all prose. At

length I was compelled to ask him which verses in Homer he would put above the story of *The Prodigal Son?* Was any poetry better than:

> "This my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found."

He laughed at once charmingly.

"We all know our own trade best," he chuckled, delighted at having drawn me.

The worst of any attempt to give a pen-portrait of a man one has known is that one is so apt to deal chiefly with his intellect and give a picture of his mind without showing his heart and temperament. It should be impossible for me to talk of Davidson without insisting again and again on his generous sympathy and the charm of his companionship. His whimsicalities of judgment were really proof of his chivalric earnestness. If he had thought that Henley had been ill-used by the world, or if he had felt that Henley had given great work, or much love to the world, nothing would have induced him to say a word against him. His thirst was for justice: he was always trying to establish the equitable balance: James Thomson had been neglected, therefore he overpraised James Thomson. Meredith was passing through his day almost unnoticed. Davidson never let his name go by without the warmest commendation. And this chivalry of disposition went

with a sweet temper, a quick sense of humor, and the most generous appreciation of his friends and of contemporary work.

He endured poverty, too, heroically and without murmur or tinge of envy, though with the years it became increasingly burdensome to him. His wife and he came to stay a few days with us once. Mrs. Davidson was a very pretty and very charming person, whom I was glad to know better. I found her very simple and sympathetic. One evening the fire was a little warm, and Davidson and I had talked philosophy for some time and wearied the ladies. At length Davidson began reciting one of his later philosophic poems, in his usual somewhat monotonous chanting way: it was very long, and he went on and on, encouraged by my interest; suddenly we discovered that Mrs. Davidson had fallen asleep.

Davidson took the interruption perfectly.

"No wonder she fell asleep," he said sympathetically. "She must be tired out. We are too poor to keep a servant always, and sometimes the household work is too much for her, poor dear!

"Isn't it a shame?" he added, "that I can't get a decent living for myself and my wife; though I work incessantly, and as hard as ever I can."

"What do your books bring in?" I asked.

"About a hundred pounds a year," he replied; "I couldn't live on them: but now and then I get a windfall that tides us along. Lewis Waller gave me £250

for my translation of *Ruy Blas*. Did you see the play? I called it *The Queen's Romance*: it went about fifty nights. If it had gone another week, I'd have made more money out of it. I think luck has been a little against me. Mrs. Langtry, you know, Lady de Bathe, gave me £250 for a play: *Mlle. Mars:* it went into rehearsal; I had built mountainous hopes on it: King Edward suddenly paid a visit to her theatre and in consequence the play she had, revived and she didn't need mine. Tree, too, paid me for a translation of *Cyrano de Bergerac;* but never put it on, and George Alexander for a play on Launcelot and Mrs. Patrick Campbell for a version of the *Phèdre*. I don't know what we should have done without such windfalls. Before our two boys grew up and began to fend for themselves it was often very hard to make both ends meet."

"Is it quiet where you live now?" I asked.

"Streatham is rather noisy," he replied, "but the noises don't prevent my writing, thank God!"

"Why don't you do more journalism?" I probed further, thinking that this might be the means by which his writing talent could come to the assistance of his genius.

"I'm unfitted for it," he replied, "for anything at all indeed except poetry: prose takes me more time and effort. I must just go on as best I can: there's no other outlet or hope for me."

"What a shame!" I cried, "that men of letters are

not subsidized in England! Have you ever approached the Government for a pension?"

"Friends have spoken of it," he replied, "but I don't think anything has been done."

"Something must be done," I urged; "you should stir them up, get them to act."

"No good now," he said, "something may be done later when the Liberals come in. I've always been a Radical, you know," he added, a little proudly, I thought.

I don't know why it never struck me that I should use any of the papers I edited to puff Davidson into prominence. I cannot account for my own shameful negligence in this respect. I can only admit the fact and partially explain it by saying that Davidson always seemed to me properly appreciated. All the writers I spoke to about him recognized his genius: they didn't perhaps put him as high as I did, but one and all realized that he would be among the English poets when he died. It seemed almost impertinent to praise such a master; but this excuse is rather an apology than the simple truth: the truth is, I never thought of puffing Davidson any more than Bernard Shaw or Harold Frederic, or anyone who didn't expressly ask to be noticed. My dreadful negligence in this respect was brought home to me bitterly when it was too late, for I was told that Davidson had been hurt a little by my reticence. Had he said a word to me I'd have done anything I could: but he

was too proud to ask, I suppose, and I too much engrossed in other matters to think even of helping my friend. The only plea I can urge in mitigation of my seeming callousness is that today the fight is so hot for all of us writers and artists, that we are apt to overlook even sacred obligations if they are not pressed upon our notice.

About this time my health broke down, and for some years I was in many difficulties: when I partially emerged in 1904, or 1905, I met Davidson again, and found him changed: he had grown self-assertive, and at the same time had developed a certain bitterness of attitude which seemed out of tune with his kindly temperament and fair habit of mind. All men need to have a good conceit of themselves in order to go through life sanely; we should all grow thick, hard shells of conceit like lobsters to protect our sensibilities from rude hands. And if this is true of all men it is tenfold truer of the writer and artist who has to persist in being at his best and doing his best in spite of the amused contempt or neglect of his contemporaries.

The conditions of life for the poet or artist are a thousand times severer than most men imagine. In the usual walks of life—in trade or in the professions—high talent or industry is associated with reward; the barrister who becomes a learned lawyer or a great advocate, the doctor who shows exceptional capacity is almost certain to win position

and a competence; at fifty he can reckon on having a large income and an easy and honored life. But the poet or artist has to face an altogether different experience; the progress he makes in his art divorces him from popularity; it is ordinary sentiment in ordinary jingle that pays; every step the artist makes of comprehension and accomplishment removes him further from the mass of men and from success. His growth leads him inevitably from the praise of his fellows to their disdain and hatred. If he feels it in him to reach the level of Dante or Shakespeare, he will pass from a certain popularity and respect, to contempt and dislike and may account himself fortunate if the hatred of him does not turn to active persecution and punishment. And if in spite of all this, the soldier of the ideal dedicates his soul to the highest and dares the uttermost, he knows that his crown will be of thorns, his kingship a derision, his throne, a cross.

All the time, it is true, he will be buoyed up by the consciousness that he is in intimate relation with the soul of things, or, if you will, by his own self-esteem. It is dangerous to take such self-assurance as a guide, though it is very difficult not to trust the high self-estimate which has helped you again and again to achievement. The higher one climbs the more difficult and perilous the next ascent. Failure is certain ultimately: failure and a fall. Sooner or later the dark hour comes for all of us.

When he was over forty years of age Davidson reached this pass. Starting from near the bottom of the social hierarchy, he had won to the very top: he had made a name as common as Smith immortal; had crowned himself in the Temple not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens, and yet he was confronted with the vast indifference of the public that cares less for poets than for acrobats, and exposed to the envious attacks of venomous poetasters and journalists, and this at a time when he was without money and without influence, but with health failing and disease threatening. It is to Davidson's honor that in that dread hour he never whimpered or whined or thought of giving in; instead of abating his high pretensions as a poet, he set them higher still; he would be a prophet as well, or rather he was a prophet, and what was true to him, that he would set forth with all emphasis. Alas! in spite of his sincerity and unswerving devotion to truth, in spite of all his gifts as a singer, and all his goodness as lover and father and friend, he could discover no light in the darkness, no sun, no star. But his courage held; he would sing all encompassing Night, then, and Nothingness, and himself set therein sightless yet a god! the only god, indeed!

That way madness lies: such pride dwarfs the mind and maims the soul.

In the sad preface to his last work, *Fleet Street and Other Poems,* he says: "Men should no longer

St Winifred's,
Fairmile Avenue,
Streatham, S.W.

Nov. 24. 98.

My dear Harris,

The fascination of
the same immediate
experience, the same inward,
and extraordinary likeness
and unlikeness, and
something more — something
you did (or we once, alas!
I think) you know — Rich
you much in my mind.
I wish all you again

just now; but I punctuate the time with this letter.

I keep searching for images of the crisis of life, the first heave and shudder of the turn of the tide; a cracking, opening; the dislocations of the whole trend and volume of the ocean, but afterwards an astonishingly full and rich vision of the world as one swings out to sea and the sunset. Yours ever

John Davidson

degrade themselves under such appellations as Christian, Mohammedan, Agnostic, Monist. Men are the Universe become conscious," and so forth. That "degrade themselves" is somewhat overpitched. No one calls himself Christian who does not feel that he is thereby doing his best to ennoble himself, and if Man is the Universe become conscious is there not hope in that and joy? Man's striving towards the best is as splendid as the struggle of the flower to the light, and there is a measure of happiness for both in the success and the sunshine.

There is some truth in Davidson's gospel of the man-god, though he vastly overrated its importance. All we know of God or of the Time-Spirit and purpose of things is drawn from our knowledge of ourselves; to himself man is god, and the upward groping and growth of his own soul is the only revelation of the Divine which we mortals can know. This idea overpowered Davidson: he would not believe that anyone else had ever seen it, or at least grasped its full significance, he, Davidson, and he alone, for the first time was the Universe grown conscious, and perhaps for the last time; the supreme purpose being accomplished, the Universe might now dislimn and return to chaos. In his *Testament* he set forth the stupendous presumption:

> I dare not, must not die: I am the sight
> And hearing of the infinite; in me

Matter fulfils itself; before me none
Beheld or heard, imagined, thought or felt;
And though I make the mystery known to men,
It may be none hereafter shall achieve
The perfect purpose of eternity;
It may be that the Universe attains
Self-knowledge only once; and when I cease
To see and hear, imagine, think and feel,
The end may come, and matter, satisfied,
Devolve once more through wanton change, and tides
Of slow relapse, suns, systems, galaxies,
Back to ethereal oblivion, pure
Accomplished darkness, Night immaculate
Augmenting everlastingly in space. . . .

He had lost all measure, he did not see that the coming to complete consciousness is a sign of maturity in the individual, and that all the great work, all the finest achievements come later.

The world is young and not old, mankind a youth still, in the brisk morning of life indeed, surcharged with health and vigor, electric with courage and hope, eyes aglow with heavenly radiance! Instead of singing himself as the ultimate, Davidson should have sung himself as herald and harbinger of the great time coming.

No Thor can drain the ocean! Davidson was not content with the fragment of fame he had achieved; he would have all men acknowledge his greatness; he was tragically ambitious, impious in self-asser-

tion; the Scotch preacher vein in him becoming more and more dominant choked the sweet poetry.

Every time we met from 1907 onwards there was deterioration in him: the worse he did, the higher he put his claims. If one praised his poetry and begged him to give the world more of it, he pooh-poohed it all. I reminded him once of how exquisitely he had written of larks and their singing, and he replied:

"My dear Frank, Shelley did it better, and I have better things to do, greater songs to sing; which you will not listen to."

"I'm ready to listen," I cried; but he shrugged his shoulders and drew silence about him as a garment. I was full of disquiet and distress about him and wondered how he would pull through. Then the news of his pension came and delighted me. It has come in the very nick of time, I exulted, to save him from himself: true, it is only £100 a year; but that to Davidson is a great deal, and it is the full and fitting and perfect reply of the Future to the vile journalists' attacks on him of the moment. Now he is saved, I thought, and will surely do better than ever.

A few days later I met him at the door of the Café Royal in Regent Street and congratulated him warmly. For the first time I thought he posed a little, was inclined to be pompous.

"It has done me good," he admitted, "but what I like about it is, it is evidently given for my latest

work. Some glimmering of the truth I've sung has pierced the darkness; it's a sort of recognition."

"Oh, it's immense," I cried, "an English Government gives you money, says one poet is worth saving, helping: it's extraordinary, it's everything: you must really be pleased and proud and content. We are all so glad!"

He took it all with grave dignity, like a monarch receiving homage, I thought; and holding himself aloof a little for dignity's sake.

I went on my way wondering how long the intoxication would last.

Some weeks later I met him again: he was down in the dumps. When I referred to his pension he flew out at me.

"What's a hundred a year? How can one live on it? It's almost an insult. They give so-and-so two hundred and me one—it's absurd. . . ."

"A good staff, literature," I replied, "but a poor crutch; still, a hundred a year keeps a roof over one's head and a door closed against the wolf."

But why, I wondered, couldn't the English Government give so that the gift itself should be dignified by the giving. Seeing that artists and prophets and writers have scant reward in the money way, and if they belong to the future by dint of greatness, scant honor in the present: why doesn't the House of Commons, the great Council of the Nation, set one day or one hour aside each year in which to do

them honor. The names of the selected candidates might then be put upon the roll of honor and the thanks of Parliament be accorded to them and recorded. Those who seek riches and succeed, who, therefore, deserve least of their fellow-men, for they take much and give little or nothing, are awarded titles and peerages and all the rest of it; but those who have given their lives and labor to the service of man in the most disinterested way get neither wealth nor honor nor any sort of recognition. All this, it seems to me, is certain to be altered, and sooner than we think.

The pension given to Davidson did not encourage him for long; it was not enough to cover his necessities. I thought his disappointment might be dissipated, and took him for a long talk. We dined and spent the evening together. Late that night he spoke for the first time of suicide and his fear of cancer: he dwelt on the pain, and, above all, on the ignominy of the smell that accompanies the dreadful disease. "A stinking death," he called it, with the shuddering disgust of the artist. I made light of his fears, could not believe they were well founded, and if they were, assured him he would meet the Arch-Fear with perfect courage as he had met and conquered worse devils throughout his life. After all, death has to be faced by all of us!

"But cancer, cancer is disgusting," he cried; "I've always loathed and dreaded it. Do all one's fears in

life materialize to torture us? You say all our prayers are granted, perhaps all our fears, too, get realized?"

After we had parted the talk came back to me, I felt that Davidson was really depressed, and reproached myself for not having encouraged him by demonstrating the unreality of his fear; a vague anxiety at heart told me it was not well with him.

Here is a verse from that time heavy with hopeless misery, which shows I had partly divined his mood:

> And defeat was my crown!
> When, naked, I wrestled with fate
> The destinies trampled me down:—
> I fought in the van and was great,
> And I won, though I wore no crown,
> In the lists of the world; for fate
> And the destinies trampled me down—
> The myrmidons trampled me down.

The darkest page in Cervantes tells how even Quixote was trampled down by the swine: it is the same dreadful experience.

When Davidson wrote that verse despair had taken hold of him: a little while later the news came that he had disappeared; a little later still that he had killed himself. The first words of the preface to his last work, *Fleet Street,* were published as the explanation:

The time has come to make an end. There are several motives. I find my pension is not enough; I have therefore still to turn aside and attempt things for which people will pay. My health also counts. Asthma and other annoyances I have tolerated for years; but I cannot put up with cancer.

Here is what I have been able to learn of the manner of his death:

A year or so before he had taken a small house in Penzance by the sea and gone there to live with his wife and younger son. He suffered now and then from pains in the lower intestines, which he looked upon as a symptom of some cancerous growth. One March evening, after working all day, he went out to post a batch of proofs to his publisher and never returned alive.

At the inquest the doctor said he had found what he thought was a bullet hole in his head.

There is a place on the cliffs where a young man had thrown himself into the sea some time before and been drowned. Davidson reached this spot after nightfall; what decided him none can say: it is probable that he shot himself through the head while standing so that his body must fall into the waves surging fifty feet below. He was tragically resolved to make sure.

The regret of all who knew him was intensified by the fact that he had never been so well-off: he had

not only the £100 a year of the Government; but his chief publisher, Mr. Grant Richards, had also very generously undertaken to give him another £100 a year regularly for his poetry and he could reckon on translations of plays and occasional articles to bring him in as much more; but he had come to know his real value and his true position as seer and steersman to the ship, and the contrast between his deserving and what the world gave was too humiliating.

Besides, he had done most of his work: the kernel of it was there in *The Testaments* already written; despairing *Foreword* written, too; sufficient explanation: all the silly world deserved; why should he bear the horrible dagger-thrusts of pain any longer?—"the time has come to make an end."

Had he but realized how his desperate deed would darken the outlook for others, he would have taken courage and waited for Nature's freeing. . . . Dear, brave Davidson!

The coroner's jury brought in a merciful verdict —"found drowned."

The news shocked the town; every one had been talking of him and his pension, thinking him lucky to have got it, when suddenly he threw the money back in the faces of the givers and left the arena in disgust. For one moment the desperate act made men pause and think. Had he been treated badly? Were these poets not merely "the idle singers of an idle day"; but men of character, capable of desperate

resolution, persons to be proud of and to emulate, and not merely amiable "cranks" to be half pitied, half despised?

Some pretended he had killed himself because of a virulent journalistic attack on his *Testaments* by a ribald poetaster, but that was nonsense. Better than most men Davidson knew exactly the value and meaning of such envious slander. Years before, he had written, "If a poet or any other writer can be killed by criticism the sooner it is done the better."

But for a moment the world questioned. Then the tide of life flowed on again and all was as before. The English troubled themselves as little about the suicide as they had troubled themselves about the poet or the prophet. What was his death, after all, but another man gone "where we all must go"?

One word more, when after some three months of anxiety, misery and searching on the part of his sons and wife, the sea gave up its dead and what remained of John Davidson was found on the shore near Penzance, the eldest son resolved to bury his father as he would have wished to be buried. With the native refinement of the artist Davidson had always hated the idea of being wound in swaddling-clothes and put in the earth to decay. He had told his boys whom he had treated as "pals" that he would prefer to be buried at sea and his sons now carried out his wishes. They took his remains in a funeral launch all draped in black and when far out-

side the three miles limit, gave him to the freedom and sweetness of the deep he loved.

Now what is the true moral or permanent meaning of Davidson's life to us who remain and to those who are to come after us? It was undeniably a great life, a life of splendid accomplishment, of heroic achievement. Whatever may be thought of his *Testaments* and his prose invocation of the Lords, and his contemptuous depreciation of the woman's movement, there can be no doubt that John Davidson was a man of large and liberal mind who spent himself in devotion to high purposes, a poet who might have been named Greatheart, whose best verses have passed into the language and form part of the inheritance of the race. *The Last Journey* is the finest poem of the sort in English literature, though both Browning and Arnold have treated the same subject. The last verses of it reach tragic grandeur:

My feet are heavy now, but on I go,
  My head erect beneath the tragic years.
The way is steep, but I would have it so;
  And dusty, but I lay the dust with tears,
Though none can see me weep: alone I climb
The rugged path that leads me out of time—
    Out of time and out of all,
    Singing yet in sun and rain,
    "Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
    Round the world and home again."

Farewell the hope that mocked, farewell despair
That went before me still and made the pace.
The earth is full of graves, and mine was there
Before my life began, my resting-place;
And I shall find it out and with the dead
Lie down for ever, all my sayings said—
Deeds all done and songs all sung,
While others chant in sun and rain,
"Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
Round the world and home again."

What shall be said of the man who could write like that? Davidson will live with Burns, it seems to me; he is not so great a force: he has not Burns's pathos nor his tenderness nor his humor; but he does not write in a dialect: he is a master of pure English, and his best work touches extremes of beauty and tragic sadness. His appalling end, too, is a sort of natural canonization; suicide carries with it the sanctity of supreme suffering, and such majestic singularity defies oblivion.

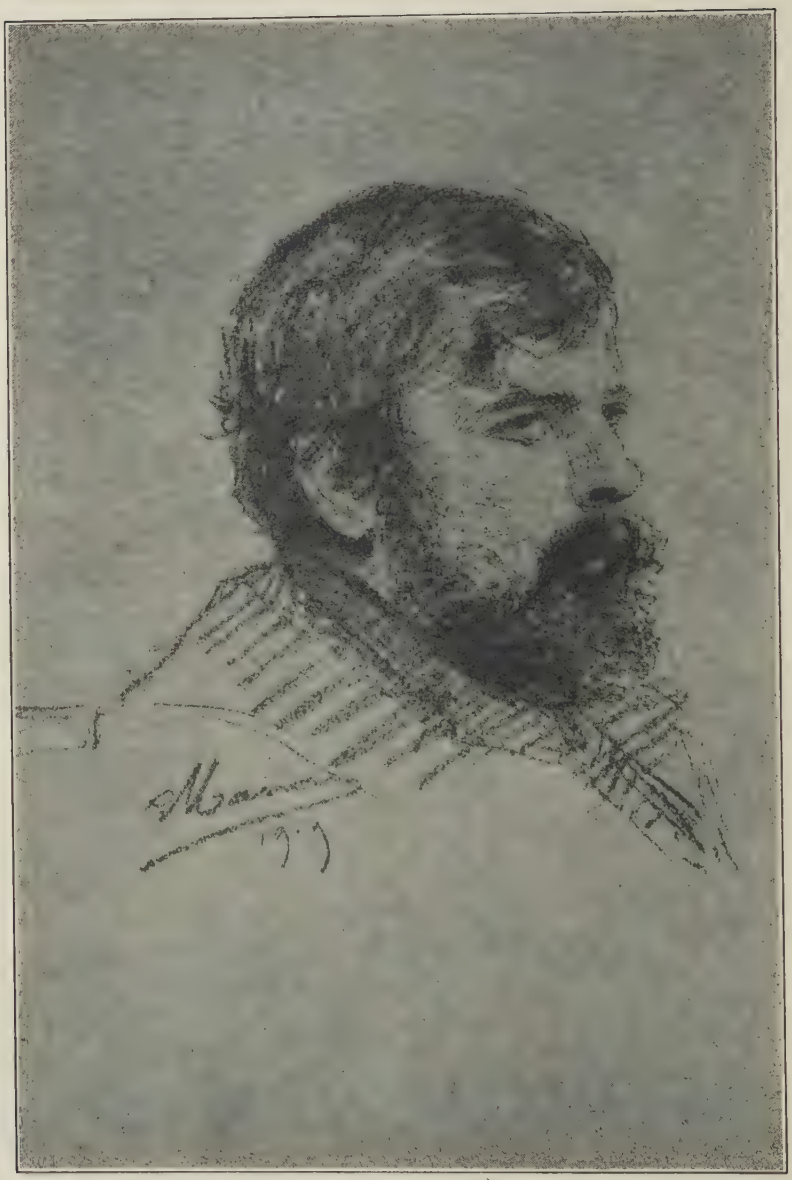
This is part of Davidson's reward, that his name will be remembered for ever, and his unhappy fate will be used to make life easier for men of genius in the future. We must never forget, too, that if artistic creation is the most difficult, most arduous, most nerve-shattering toil in the world, yet when even partially successful it has the highest recompense in triumphant joy, the glory of the spirit. Our friend,

too, had his moments of exultation and ecstasy when he lived on the topmost height of man's achievement.

But people say that Davidson was a failure, and talk of his suicide as proof of weakness. Whistler, they assert, won through to success and wealth, whereas Davidson gave up the fight in despair, therefore Davidson was a smaller man. Such argument takes no account of the fact that perhaps of all artists success is easiest to the painter and hardest to the poet or writer. The painter's art is universal and appeals to all men, whereas the writer's appeal is limited to those of his own speech. Whistler was honored in France and his work bought for the Luxembourg long before he was even taken seriously in England or America. Davidson had no such outlet: he had to win in England or lose altogether. Moreover, thousands of people can see beauty in a picture for one who loves poetry, and a picture can be finished in a week, whereas a poem of the same importance will take half a year.

Davidson, in my opinion, was quite as big a man as Whistler, a nobler character, indeed, with just as deep and fair a mind, just as splendid an artistic endowment; his courage, too, was as high; but the test he was put to was a thousandfold severer. Whistler often earned fifty pounds in an afternoon: he lived habitually at the rate of a couple of thousand pounds a year, whereas Davidson could hardly earn a tenth of that sum. There were always people of great po-

sition who were eager to ask Whistler to lunch or dinner. At forty he was one of the personages in London; men pointed him out as he passed in the street, there was a "legend" about him. Davidson, on the other hand, was as little regarded as a butler or a bootblack. One of the rarest and most superb flowers of genius of our time, he was almost totally neglected: the fact does not say much for the garden or the gardeners.



RICHARD MIDDLETON
FROM A DRAWING IN THE ENGLISH REVIEW

RICHARD MIDDLETON: AD MEMORIAM

IT was in the autumn of 1907 that Edgar Jepson introduced me to Richard Middleton in the office of *Vanity Fair*. A big man and perfectly self-possessed, his burly figure, thick black beard and furrowed forehead made him look ten years older than he was: five and thirty, at least, I thought him till I caught the laughing, boyish gleam in his grey-blue eyes. He had assisted Jepson in the editing of the paper while I was in America, and on my return he helped me for some little time. He was casual, cheerfully unpunctual, careless rather than critical in correcting other men's work, and these ordinary shortcomings were somewhat harassing. One day he remarked in the air, that if he could get paid for poetry he'd prefer writing to editing. I was a little surprised: I had not thought of him as a poet; but we soon came to an arrangement. His first verses surprised me; there was the singing quality in them, a happy ease of melody, a sureness and distinction of phrase which proved that he was indeed a poet. Better still, his best verses did not echo his forerunners; imitative cadences there were, of course; a few bor-

rowed graces; but usually the song was his own and not derived—a true poet.

One day I asked my assistant why there had been no poetry of Middleton's in the last week's impression: had he sent nothing?

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "he sent in two or three poems as usual, but they were too free, I was afraid they'd shock Mrs. Grundy, so I'm about to return them."

Needless to say that made me eager to read them: one was "The Bathing Boy." I published it promptly, and told Middleton what I thought, that it was finer than Herrick, with something of unsophisticated beauty in it, pure loveliness. After that my defences went down before him. I published whatever he sent me as soon as I received it, and when he told me he wanted to do some stories, I was more than eager to see what his prose would be like; a page of it convinced me; a little too rhythmic and rounded, it had its own charm and was curiously characteristic.

"The Bathing Boy" made me want to know Middleton better. I found him deeply read in English, and of an astoundingly sure judgment in all matters of literature. His ripeness of mind excited my curiosity, and I probed further. There was in him a modern mixture of widest comprehension with a child's acceptance of vice and suffering and all abnormalities. I say a "child's" because it was purely

curious and without any tinge of ethical judgment. Here is a self-revealing couplet:

> A human blossom glad for human eyes,
> Made pagan by a child's serenity.

At twenty-five Middleton had come to his full growth and was extraordinarily mature. In every respect a typical artist, he had no religious belief, death seemed to him the proper and only climax to the fleeting show, but he delighted in the pageantry of life, and the melody of words entranced him. This visible world and the passions of men and women were all his care.

Even on the practical side he was world-taught, if not world-wise; he had been educated at St. Paul's School, and then spent some years in an insurance office in the City: he had given up a large salary, he said, to write poetry. As I got to know and like him, I noticed that his head was massive, his blue eyes finely expressive, his characteristic attitude a dignified, somewhat disdainful acceptance of life's perverse iniquities.

> When I lived I sought no wings,
> Schemed no heaven, planned no hell,
> But, content with little things,
> Made an earth, and it was well.

I am anxious not to say one word more than he deserved: I never heard a new thought from him:

I cannot call him, therefore, a bringer of new light; at the same time, I scarcely ever found his judgment at fault: he could have said with Heine—"I stand on the topmost wave of all the culture of my time," and perhaps that is all we can ask of the poet. He was not taken by the popular idols; Tennyson, he thought, had only written half a dozen lyrics, and "Dowson, you know, left three"; he regarded Browning as the greatest poet since Shakespeare: "he has given us a greater body of high poetry," he would say, "than any other English poet, though he never reached the magic of Keats." Blake he seemed to wince from; the poet he praised; but the prophet disquieted him, disturbed the serenity of his pagan, sad acquiescence in the mysteries of this unintelligible world.

The least one can say of Middleton is that at twenty-five he stood as an equal among the foremost men of his time in knowledge of thought and of life, and was among the first of living singers in natural endowment. He was a love-poet, too, as the greatest have been, as Shakespeare and Keats, Goethe and Dante were, and it was this superb faculty that made me hope great things from him.

Here is a verse which justifies hope, I think:

> Love played with us beneath the laughing trees,
> We praised him for his eyes and silver skin,
> And for the little teeth that shone within
> His ruddy lips; the bracken touched his knees,

Earth wrapped his body in her softest breeze,
And through the hours that held no count of sin
We kept his court, until above our din
Night westward drove her glittering argosies.

And this:

Come, Death, and free me from these earthly walls
That heaven may hold our final festivals
The white stars trembling under!
I am too small to keep this passionate wonder
Within my human frame: I would be dead
That God may be our bed.

I feel her breath upon my eyes, her hair
Falls on me like a blessing, everywhere
I hear her warm blood leaping,
And life it seems is but a fitful sleeping,
And we but fretful shades that dreamed before,
That love, and are no more.

Though he can rise to this height of passionate utterance, the unique distinction of this book of Middleton's is that there is not a bad, hardly a weak poem in the whole volume: I know few books of which so much can be said. Middleton at twenty-seven had not only a wonderful lyrical gift: but the power of self-criticism of the masters.

Some critics have gone so far as to say that his prose was better than his verse; I do not agree with them; his prose was always the prose of a singer;

but he was nevertheless a story-teller of undoubted talent. His tales of boys are among the best in the language.

His friend, Mr. Savage, tells us that "in his last year Middleton wrote scarcely any poetry at all . . . he came to love young children and people who are simple and kindly and not too clever . . . certainly he would not have written any more poems like his 'Irene' "—poems, that is, of passion.

Well, I cannot go so far as that: I think had he lived he would have written both prose and poetry in the future as in the past: he told me more than once that he wrote stories because he found them more saleable. But the most passionate poems were his favorites as they were his best. "There is no demand for poetry," he would say, in wonder, laying stress on the word "demand," "no *demand* at all."

And here we come to the tragedy of Middleton's life as of a great many other lives. There is no "demand" in our Anglo-Saxon world for high literary or artistic work of any kind. If it is nevertheless produced, it is produced in spite of the fact that no one wants it and very few appreciate it; it must be given, therefore, and not sold, as love is given and friendship and pity and all high things. But in spite of all such arguments the tragedy remains, and the gloom of it darkens all our ways.

Reading this volume of poems now in the light of what happened, it is easy to see the attraction which

Death held for Richard Middleton, the abyss enticing him again and again. He had lived and loved, sung his songs and told his stories, and the public wouldn't listen, didn't care. Well, he doesn't care much either: life is only a dream, and this dreamer's too easily wearied to struggle, too proud to complain. A dozen poems show changing moods with the same changeless refrain:

> Too tired to mock or weep
> The world that I have missed,
> Love, in your heaven let me sleep
> An hour or two, before I keep
> My unperturbèd tryst.

Or this, with its reminiscence of Swinburne:

Shall tremble to our laughter,
  While we leave our tears to your hopeless years,
Though there be nothing after;
And while your day uncloses
Its lorn and tattered roses,
  We shall pluck the stars from your prison bars
And bind celestial posies.

Or this lovely verse:

> Gladly the rigging sings,
> But, oh! how glad are we,
> Lords of the dreaming sea,
> And of delicious things;

We are more rich than kings,
Or any men that be,
While down eternity
We beat with shadowy wings.

And this finally:

No more than a dream that sings
In the streets of space;
Ah, would that my soul had wings,
Or a resting-place!

As one turns the leaves one finds beauty everywhere, on every page joy in living and in love, and everywhere serenity, the sad serenity of acquiescence, and now and again the high clear note that promised so much to those who knew and loved him, and how could one help loving him if one knew him?

For all the rich and curious things
That I have found within my sleep,
Are naught beside this child that sings
Among the heather and the sheep;
And I, who with expectant eyes
Have fared across the star-lit foam,
See through my dreams a new sun rise
To conquer unachievèd skies,
And bring the dreamer home.

And this verse, perhaps the most characteristic of all, steeped as it is in the contradictory essences of life:

I have been free, and had all heaven and hell
For prison, until my piteous hands grew sore
Striking the voiceless walls; and now it is well
Even though I be a captive evermore.
My grateful song shall fill my hiding-place
To find Eternity hath so sweet a face.

Ah, the "piteous hands" and "voiceless walls!"

It is over a year now since Mr. Savage called on me and told me that Richard Middleton was dead; that he had killed himself in Brussels. I stared at him unable to realize it, shocked out of thought, amazed and aching. I had never thought of Middleton as in distress or really poor: he had often spoken genially of his people, tenderly of a sister; often when he was hard up declared that he would have to go home, "retire into country-quarters for my pocket's health," meeting poverty as it should be met, with good-humor. In 1910 I noticed that his tone was a little sharper, and busied myself for him with this editor and that, and was relieved to see his contributions appearing wherever I had any influence, notably in the *Academy* and *The English Review*. In the summer of 1911 he gave me his book of poems to get published, thinking I had more influence with publishers than I possessed; I told him it would be published before the end of the year, and had good hopes in the matter. I could not conceal from him that there would be but little money in the

venture, though I kept the fact to myself that the most willing publisher I could find wanted the cost of the book guaranteed. Had I been asked as to his circumstances, I should have said that Middleton was making his way slowly but surely in the esteem and affection of all good readers; that a certain number of persons already counted him as the most promising of living English poets, and that their admiration was a forecast of fame.

True, he had been ailing all through the summer; a tedious little malady, slow to get cured, plagued him with annoyance and self-disgust; true, he had talked now and then as one talks to intimate friends in moments of depression of "going out," heart-sick for the time being of the Sisyphean labor; but the weariness and disgust appeared to me to be superficial; his smile came as boyish, gay as ever; his joy in living, especially in Brussels, unvexed by the ghouls of English convention and respectability, seemed as deep as the sea. I have been told since that like Francis Adams he had tried already to kill himself, had indeed gone about for years hugging the idea that this door of deliverance was always open to him; but he had not shown me this soul-side; or perhaps I did not encourage his attempts at confession because of my own struggle with similar melancholy. Whatever the explanation may be the news of his self-murder fell on me as a shock: he would not wait for success: he had gone to death

in hatred of living: the pity of it and the unavailing regret!

I was told later of those four days in Brussels which he passed in the cold, hired bedroom, four days in which he forced himself to face the Arch-Fear and conquer it. At the beginning he wrote a post card telling what he was about to do, taking farewell of his friend, in high pagan fashion, before the long journey, and then in that last awful hour, with the bottle of chloroform before him, he wrote across the card: "A broken and a contrite spirit Thou wilt not despise." The awfulness of it, and the pity deeper than tears.

> So here's an end, I ask forgetfulness
> Now that my little store of hours is spent,
> And heart to laugh upon my punishment—
> Dear God, what means a poet more or less?

Well, it means everything to the poet and more than is generally imagined to the nation from which he springs. Sooner or later all races must learn that their artists—the singers and painters and seers, the priests of the True, the Beautiful and the Good—are the rarest and most valuable of the sons of men. By the very nature of their high calling, they can expect no reward from their contemporaries; their appeal is to the future; their duty to set the course and chart the unattempted seas. More than decent

provision for their needs, these soldiers of the ideal will not expect; but that should be given them by the State and such honor to boot as may be possible.

Thanks to their puritanism, as much as to their purblind practicality, the English are behind most civilized races in recognizing this imperious duty.

A short time ago John Davidson threw life up in disgust: he couldn't get a decent living in England, and he was a great poet; one of the immortals: now Richard Middleton shakes off the burden as too heavy. It were better to stone the prophets than to starve them, better hate than this ineffable callous contempt.

Take it at its lowest; these poets and artists are, so to speak, the fairest flowers in the garden, the only perennial flowers indeed; what are the gardeners and governors thinking of to allow the glories of the place to be blasted by the biting wind of poverty and neglect? even intelligent selfishness would shield and cherish them.

There is another side to this British disdain of high work. In the *Daily Mail* I read:

> Today is the birthday of the greatest of living Englishmen. Mr. Chamberlain is, indeed, more than that—he is the most illustrious statesman now alive in the world; but it is as the pre-eminent Englishman that his fellow-countrymen not in these islands alone, but in every province of the British Empire, will think of him.

Canning was a very famous Prime Minister and the British authorities of the time would no doubt have smiled if they had been told that a little surgeon's apprentice was a thousand times greater than Canning, and was destined to be ten thousand times more famous. Yet it was true: Canning today is almost forgotten, sinking rapidly into oblivion, while the name of Keats is growing more and more sacred: Keats already infinitely greater than Canning.

And in fifty or a hundred years from today the names of John Davidson and Richard Middleton will be much better known and more highly esteemed even by Members of Parliament and journalists than the names of Chamberlain or Asquith or Balfour. It is her best and greatest whom England disdains and neglects: her second-best and third-best and fiftieth-best are lauded to the brazen skies and rewarded beyond all possible desert.

When I think of the fame of Chatterton and the halo that now surrounds his name, and the condemnation which his neglect casts on his age, I am sure that in the time to come even Englishmen will condemn this twentieth-century England because of the tragic fates of Davidson and Middleton; for even Richard Middleton was a far greater poet and greater man than Chatterton, riper too, bringing achievement in his hands as well as promise.

"But what can we do?" I may be asked, and the true answer is easy enough. We should cultivate

reverence in us for what is really great and discard some of the reverence all are eager to express for what is not great, but often the reverse of great.

> **Heartily know**
> **When the half-gods go**
> **The gods arrive.**

Such understanding is a plant of slowest growth. In the meantime, we might begin to question whether England should spend not £1,200 a year in pittances to starving poets and artists and their widows and orphans, but £1,200,000 a year as a start: it were better to lose a Dreadnought than a Davidson or a Middleton.

England gives twelve hundred pounds a year as a life pension to every Cabinet Minister, and that sum is considered enough to divide between all her unfortunate poets and writers and those nearest and dearest to them. Now one John Davidson or one Richard Middleton is worth more—let the truth be said boldly for once!—one Richard Middleton is in himself rarer and in his work more valuable than all the Cabinet Ministers seen in England during his lifetime.

The Cabinet Minister has only to win in the limited competition of the House of Commons; he has only to surpass living rivals, the men of his own time; but the poet might be the first of his generation and

yet deserve little: to win our admiration he has to measure himself with the greatest of all the past and hold his place among the Immortals.

If one set of Cabinet Ministers were blotted out tomorrow, who can doubt, knowing the high-minded patriotism of the parliamentary office-seeker, who can doubt that another set of Cabinet Ministers would be forthcoming immediately? And it is just as certain that after a month or a year, the new set would be about as efficient or inefficient as their lamented predecessors. But thinkers and poets like Davidson and Middleton are not forthcoming in this profusion. If there is no "demand" for them in England, there is assuredly no "supply" in the usual sense of that overworked word.

Now what is the value of such men to the nation? What are the true seers and singers and prophets worth?

It is almost impossible to put any limit to their value. I do not hope to persuade Englishmen or Americans of this truth for many a year to come, though I have the highest warrant for it and am absolutely convinced of the fact. Even now we know that the wisest and best of mankind put the highest estimate on these reporters and teachers. Goethe has said in the most solemn way that the purpose of life itself—"the final cause and consummation of all natural and human activity is dramatic poetry."

And we have higher and more unimpeachable tes-

timony than even Goethe's. If one reads the twelfth chapter of Matthew carefully, it is plain that Jesus believed that to take false prophets for true and to missee and mistreat the true seer was the sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin which would never be forgiven. We are apt to regard this statement as rhapsodical; but I take it as the plain statement of an eternal truth, and must set forth my belief here as best I can.

It is plain that the nations which make amplest provision for their singers and artists and seers and treat them with the greatest kindness and respect, as France and Germany do, are indubitably the happiest of nations, the highest in civilization and in so far the strongest as well.

A true spiritual standard of values is infinitely more difficult to establish than an economic standard, but it is even more necessary to the well-being of nations.

We all know in these materialistic times that to debase the economic standard is to bring chaos into life; but we do not yet realize that to show disrespect to the highest spiritual standard is still more fatal.

To allow seers and artists to starve in a community is simply the incontrovertible symptom of mortal disease, the sure proof that in that community there is not enough reverence for high things, not enough respect for the powers and purposes of the soul to

keep the body-politic from decay and dissolution. Without a certain health of spirit there is no life possible to man, contempt of the highest brings with it inevitably the death of the organism. *Man does not live by bread alone or for bread.*

Civilization itself is nothing but the humanization of man in society and no class do so much to humanize men as the priests of the ideal, the seers and singers and artists.

Now that industrial communities, thanks to the achieved lordship of natural forces, can produce wealth in enormous quantities, provision should be made by every State for their men of genius. How it is done, does not matter very much; but it must be done and in countries like England and America it will never be done too lavishly. What shall become of people who take the children's bread and give it to the dogs?

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate.

The houses of those who despise the prophets are certain to be left desolate; the sentence endures for ever, it is a part of the nature of things and not one

jot or one tittle of it shall pass away. Let England take the lesson to heart.

Davidson and Middleton, the one about fifty, the other at thirty, threw away their lives as not worth living, as impossible to be lived, indeed. Two of the finest spirits in England allowed practically to starve, for that is what it comes to: such a catastrophe never happened before even in England. Under the old hidebound aristocratic regime of the eighteenth century young Chatterton killed himself, and his death was regarded with a certain disquietude as a portent. But Chatterton was very young and stood alone, and the singularity of his fate allowed one to pass it over as almost accident. But here we have two distinguished men killing themselves after they have proved their powers. What does it mean?

It means first of all that the present government judged in the most important of all functions is the worst government yet known even in England; judged by the highest standard it must be condemned pitilessly, for the first and highest object of all governments is to save just these extraordinary talents, these "sports" from whom, as science teaches, all progress comes, and to win from them their finest and best.

The same government and the same people that allowed Davidson and Middleton to starve, got only a half product from Whistler and punished Wilde

with savage ferocity, while ennobling mediocrities and millionaires, the dogs and the wolves, and wasting a thousand millions of pounds on the South African War. Surely their houses are insecure!

Fancy giving every Judge three thousand pounds a year retiring pension, and allotting Davidson a hundred and Middleton nothing! The handwriting on the wall is in letters of fire.

SIR RICHARD BURTON

RALEIGH, Sir Walter of that ilk, has always seemed to me the best representative of Elizabethan England; for he could speak and act with equal inspiration. He was a gentleman and adventurer, a courtier and explorer, a captain by sea and land, equally at home in Indian wigwam or English throne-room. A man of letters, too, master of a dignified, courtly English, who could write on universal history to while away the tedium of prison. Raleigh touched life at many points, and always with a certain mastery; yet his advice to his son is that of a timorous prudence. "Save money," he says; "never part with a man's best friend," and yet he himself as a courtier could squander thousands of pounds on new footgear. One of the best "all-round" men in English history was Raleigh, though troubled with much serving which, however, one feels came naturally to him; for he was always absolutely sceptical as to any after-life, and so won a concentrated and uncanny understanding of this life and his fellow-men. And yet Raleigh perished untimely on a scaffold, as if to show that no worldly wisdom can be exhaustive, falling to ruin because he

could not divine the perverse impulses of a sensual pedant.

But in spite of the vile ingratitude of James and his base betrayal, aristocratic England managed to use Walter Raleigh and rewarded him, on the whole, handsomely. He played a great part even in those spacious days; was a leader of men in Ireland in his youth, a Captain of the Queen's Guard in manhood; and, ennobled and enriched, held his place always among the greatest, and at last died as an enemy of kings, leaving behind him a distinguished name and a brilliant page in the history of his country.

But what would the England of today, the England of the smug, uneducated Philistine tradesmen, make of a Raleigh if they had one? The question and its answer may throw some light on our boasted "progress" and the astonishingly selfish and self-satisfied present-day civilization of till-and-pill.

Richard Burton I met for the first time in a London drawing-room after his return from the Gold Coast sometime in the eighties. His reputation was already world-wide—the greatest of African explorers, the only European who had mastered Arabic and Eastern customs so completely that he had passed muster as a Mohammedan pilgrim and had preached in Mecca as a Mollah. He knew a dozen Indian languages, too, it was said, and as many more European, besides the chief African dialects;

was, in fine, an extraordinary scholar and a master of English to boot, a great writer.

I was exceedingly curious, and very glad indeed to meet this legendary hero. Burton was in conventional evening dress, and yet, as he swung round to the introduction, there was an untamed air about him. He was tall, about six feet in height, with broad, square shoulders; he carried himself like a young man, in spite of his sixty years, and was abrupt in movement. His face was bronzed and scarred, and when he wore a heavy moustache and no beard he looked like a prize-fighter; the naked, dark eyes—imperious, aggressive eyes, by no means friendly; the heavy jaws and prominent hard chin gave him a desperate air; but the long beard which he wore in later life, concealing the chin and pursed-out lips, lent his face a fine, patriarchal expression, subduing the fierce provocation of it to a sort of regal pride and courage. "Untamed"—that is the word which always recurs when I think of Burton.

I was so curious about so many things in regard to him that I hesitated and fumbled, and made a bad impression on him; we soon drifted apart—I vexed with myself, he loftily indifferent.

It was Captain Lovett-Cameron who brought us closer together; a typical sailor and good fellow, he had been Burton's companion in Africa and had sucked an idolatrous admiration out of the intimacy. Burton was his hero; wiser than anyone else,

stronger, braver, more masterful, more adroit; he could learn a new language in a week, and so forth and so on—hero-worship lyrical.

"A Bayard and an Admirable Crichton in one," I remarked scoffingly. "Human, too," he replied seriously, "human and brave as Henry of Navarre."

"Proofs, proofs," I cried.

"Proofs of courage!" Cameron exclaimed, "every African explorer lives by courage: every day war-parties of hostile tribes have to be charmed or awed to friendliness; rebellious servants brought to obedience; wild animals killed, food provided—all vicissitudes Burton handled as a master, and the more difficult and dangerous the situation the more certain he was to carry it off triumphantly. A great man, I tell you, with all sorts of qualities and powers, and, if you followed his lead, the best of 'pals.'

"No one would believe how kind he is; he nursed me for six weeks through African fever—took care of me like a brother. You must know Dick really well: you'll love him."

Thanks to Cameron, Burton and I met again and dined together, and afterwards had a long palaver. Burton unbuttoned, and talked as only Burton could talk of Damascus and that immemorial East; of India and its super-subtle peoples; of Africa and human life in the raw today as it was twenty thousand years ago; of Brazil, too, and the dirty smear

of Portuguese civilization polluting her silvered waterways and defiling even the immaculate wild.

I can still see his piercing eyes, and thrill to his vivid, pictured speech; he was irresistible; as Cameron had said, "utterly unconventional." Being very young, I thought him too "bitter," almost as contemptuous of his fellows as Carlyle; I did not then realize how tragic-cruel life is to extraordinary men.

Burton was of encyclopædic reading; knew English poetry and prose astonishingly; had a curious liking for "sabre-cuts of Saxon speech"—all such words as come hot from life's mint. Describing something, I used the phrase, "Frighted out of fear." "Fine that," he cried; "is it yours? Where did you get it?"

His ethnological appetite for curious customs and crimes, for everything singular and savage in humanity was insatiable. A Western American lynching yarn held him spell-bound; a *crime passionel* in Paris intoxicated him, started him talking, transfigured him into a magnificent story-teller, with intermingled appeals of pathos and rollicking fun, camp-fire effects, jets of flame against the night.

His intellectual curiosity was astonishingly broad and deep rather than high. He would tell stories of Indian philosophy or of perverse negro habits of lust and cannibalism, or would listen to descriptions of Chinese cruelty and Russian self-mutilation till the stars paled out. Catholic in his admiration and

liking for all greatness, it was the abnormalities and not the divinities of men that fascinated him.

Deep down in him lay the despairing gloom of utter disbelief. "Unaffected pessimism and constitutional melancholy," he notices, "strike deepest root under the brightest skies," and this pessimistic melancholy was as native to Burton as to any Arab of them all. He was thinking of himself when he wrote of the Moslem, "he cannot but sigh when contemplating the sin and sorrow, and pathos and bathos of the world; and feel the pity of it, with its shifts and changes ending in nothingness, its scanty happiness, its copious misery." Burton's laughter, even, deep-chested as it was, had in it something of sadness.

At heart he was regally generous; there was a large humanity in him, an unbounded charity for the poor and helpless; a natural magnanimity, too; "an unconditional forgiveness of the direst injuries" he calls "the note of the noble."

His love of freedom was insular and curiously extravagant, showing itself in every smallest detail. "My wife makes we wear these wretched dress-clothes," he cried one evening. "I hate 'em—a livery of shame, shame of being yourself. Broad arrows would improve 'em," and the revolt of disgust flamed in his eyes.

Like most able, yet fanatical, lovers of liberty, he preferred the tyranny of one to the anarchical

misrule of the many. "Eastern despotisms," he asserts, "have arrived nearer the ideal of equality and fraternity than any republic yet invented."

"A master of life and books," I said of him afterwards to Cameron, "but at bottom as tameless and despotic as an Arab sheikh."

Two extracts from his wonderful *Arabian Nights* are needed to give color to my sketch. I make no excuse for quoting them, for they are superexcellent English, and in themselves worthy of memory. Here is a picture of the desert which will rank with Fromentin's best:

> Again I stood under the diaphanous skies, in air glorious as ether, whose every breath raises men's spirits like sparkling wine. Once more I saw the evening star hanging like a solitaire from the pure front of the western firmament; and the after-glow transfiguring and transforming, as by magic, the homely and rugged features of the scene into a fairyland lit with a light which never shines on other soils or seas. Then would appear the woollen tents, low and black, of the true Badawin, mere dots in the boundless waste of lion-tawny clays and gazelle-brown gravels, and the camp-fire dotting like a glow-worm the village centre. Presently, sweetened by distance, would be heard the wild, weird song of lads and lasses, driving, or rather pelting, through the gloaming their sheep and goats; and the measured chant of the spearsmen gravely stalking behind their charge, the camels; mingled with the bleating of the flocks and the bellowing of the humpy herds; while the reremouse flittered overhead with his tiny shriek, and

the rave of the jackal resounded through deepening glooms, and—most musical of music—the palm trees answered the whispers of the night breeze with the softest tones of falling water.

And here a Rembrandt etching of Burton story-telling to Arabs in the desert:

The sheikhs and "white-beards" of the tribe gravely take their places, sitting with outspread skirts like hillocks on the plain, as the Arabs say, around the camp-fire, whilst I reward their hospitality and secure its continuance by reading or reciting a few pages of their favourite tales. The women and children stand motionless as silhouettes outside the ring; and all are breathless with attention; they seem to drink in the words with eyes and mouth as well as with ears. The most fantastic flights of fancy, the wildest improbabilities, the most impossible of impossibilities appear to them utterly natural, mere matters of every-day occurrence. They enter thoroughly into each phase of feeling touched upon by the author; they take a personal pride in the chivalrous nature and knightly prowess of Tajal-Muluk; they are touched with tenderness by the self-sacrificing love of Azizah; their mouths water as they hear of heaps of untold gold given away in largesse like clay; they chuckle with delight every time a Kazi or a Fakir—a judge or a reverend—is scurvily entreated by some Pantagruelist of the wilderness; and, despite their normal solemnity and impassibility, all roar with laughter, sometimes rolling upon the ground till the reader's gravity is sorely tried, at the tales of the garrulous Barber and of Ali and the Kurdish sharper. To this magnetizing mood

the sole exception is when a Badawi of superior accomplishments, who sometimes says his prayers, ejaculates a startling "Astaghfaru'llah"—I pray Allah's pardon—for listening to light mention of the sex whose name is never heard amongst the nobility of the desert.

Even when I only knew Burton as a great personality I touched the tragedy of his life unwittingly more than once. I had heard that he had come to grief as Consul in Damascus—Jews there claiming to be British subjects in order to escape Mohammedan justice, and when thwarted stirring up their powerful compatriots in London to petition for his recall; his superior at Beyrout always dead against him—eventually he was recalled, some said dismissed. I felt sure he had been in the right. "Won't you tell me about it?" I asked him one evening.

"The story's too long, too intricate," he cried. "Besides, the Foreign Office admitted I was right."

When I pressed for details he replied:

"Do you remember the cage at Loches, in which an ordinary man could not stand upright or lie at ease, and so was done to death slowly by constraint. Places under our Government today are cages like that to all men above the average size."

The English could not use Burton; they could maim him.

Englishmen are so strangely inclined to overpraise the men of past times and underrate their contem-

poraries that many have been astonished at my comparing Burton with Raleigh. But, in truth, both in speech and action Burton was the greater man. He was a more daring and a more successful explorer; an infinitely better scholar, with intimate knowledge of a dozen worlds which Raleigh knew nothing about, a greater writer, too, and a more dominant, irresistible personality. Young Lord Pembroke once slapped Raleigh's face; no sane man would have thought of striking Burton. Aristocratic Elizabethan England, however, could honor Raleigh and put him to noble use, whereas Victorian England could find no place for Richard Burton and could win no service from him. Think of it! Burton knew the Near East better than any Westerner has ever known it; he was a master of literary Arabic and of the dialects spoken in Egypt and the Soudan. Moreover, as he himself puts it modestly, "the accidents of my life, my long dealings with Arabs and other Mohammedans and my familiarity not only with their idiom, but with their turn of thought and with that racial individuality which baffles description" made Burton an ideal ruler for a Mohammedan people. He was already employed under the Foreign Office.

Notwithstanding all this when we took Egypt we sent Lord Dufferin to govern it, and tossed a small consular post to Richard Burton as a bone to a dog. Dufferin knew no Arabic, and nothing about Egypt.

Burton knew more than anyone else on earth about both, and was besides a thousand times abler than the chattering, charming Irish peer. Yet Dufferin was preferred before him. Deliberately I say that all England's mistakes in Egypt—and they are as numerous and as abominable as years of needless war have ever produced—came from this one blunder. This sin England is committing every day, the sin of neglecting the able and true man and preferring to him the unfit and second-rate, and therefore negligible, man; it is the worst of crimes in a ruling caste, the sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin once labelled unforgivable. "No immorality," said Napoleon to his weak brother, "like the immorality of taking a post you're not fitted for." No wonder Burton wrote that the "crass ignorance" (of England) "concerning the Oriental peoples which should most interest her, exposes her to the contempt of Europe as well as of the Eastern World." No wonder he condemned "the regrettable raids of '83-'84," and "the miserable attacks of Tokar, Teb, and Tamasi" upon the "gallant negroids who were battling for the holy cause of liberty and religion and for escape from Turkish task-masters and Egyptian tax-gatherers." With heartfelt contempt he records the fact that there was "not an English official in camp . . . capable of speaking Arabic."

Gladstone appointed Dufferin; Gladstone sent Gordon to the Soudan at the dictation of a journalist

as ignorant as himself! Gladstone, too, appointed Cromer, and after Tokar and Teb we had the atrocious, shameful revenge on the Mahdi's remains and the barbarous murders of Denshawi; and a thousand thousand unknown tragedies besides, all because England's rulers are incapable of using her wisest sons and are determined to pin their faith to mediocrities—like choosing like, with penguin gravity.

"England," says Burton, "has forgotten, apparently, that she is at present the greatest Mohammedan empire in the world, and in her Civil Service examinations she insists on a smattering of Greek and Latin rather than a knowledge of Arabic." Here is what Burton thought about the English Civil Service; every word of it true still, and every word memorable:

> In our day, when we live under a despotism of the lower "middle-class" who can pardon anything but superiority, the prizes of competitive service are monopolized by certain "pets" of the *Médiocratie,* and prime favourites of that jealous and potent majority—the Mediocrities who know "no nonsense about merit." It is hard for an outsider to realize how perfect is the monopoly of commonplace, and to comprehend how fatal a stumbling-stone that man sets in the way of his own advancement who dares to think for himself, or who thinks more or who does more than the mob of gentlemen-employees who know very little and do even less. "He knows too much" is the direst obstacle to official

advancement in England—it would be no objection in France; and in Germany, Russia, and Italy, the three rising Powers of Europe, it would be a valid claim for promotion. But, unfortunately for England, the rule and government of the country have long been, and still are, in the hands of a corporation, a clique, which may be described as salaried, permanent and irresponsible clerks, the power which administers behind the Minister. They rule and misrule; nor is there one man in a million who, like the late Mr. Fawcett, when taking Ministerial charge, dares to think and act for himself and to emancipate himself from the ignoble tyranny of "the office."

With all its faults the English Civil Service is better than our Parliamentary masters. Like fish, a State first goes bad at the head. Burton used to tell how he came home and offered all East Africa to Lord Salisbury. He had concluded treaties with all the chiefs; no other Power was interested or would have objected. But Lord Salisbury refused the gift. "Is Zanzibar an island?" he exclaimed in wonder, and "Is East Africa worth anything?" So the Germans were allowed twenty years later to come in and cut "the wasp's waist" and bar England's way from the Cape to Cairo.

England wasted Burton, left his singular talents unused, and has already paid millions of money, to say nothing of far more precious things (some of them beyond price), for her stupidity, and England's account with Egypt is still all on the wrong

side—stands, indeed, worse than ever, I imagine; for Egypt is now bitterly contemptuous of English rule. Egypt is a source of weakness to England therefore, and not a source and fount of strength, as she would have been from the beginning if the old Parliamentary rhetor had had eyes as well as tongue, and had set Burton to do the work of teaching, organizing, and guiding which your Dufferins, Cromers, Kitcheners and the rest are incapable even of imagining.

The worst of it is that Burton has left no successor. Had he been appointed he would have seen to this, one may be sure; would have established a great school of Arabic learning in Cairo, and trained a staff of Civil Servants who would have gladly acquired at least the elements of their work—men who would not only have known Arabic, but the ablest natives, too, and so have availed themselves of a little better knowledge than their own. But, alas! the chance has been lost, and unless something is done soon, Egypt will be England's worst failure, worse even than India or Ireland.

But I must return to Burton. I should like to tell of an evening I spent once with him when Lord Lytton was present. Lytton had been Viceroy of India, the first and only Viceroy who ever understood his own infinite unfitness for the post.

"I only stayed in India," he used to say, "to prevent them sending out an even worse man."

I asked him afterwards why he didn't recommend Burton for the post; for he knew something of Burton's transcendant quality.

"They'd never send him," he cried, with unconscious snobbery. "He's not got the title or the position; besides, he'd be too independent. My God, how he'd kick over the traces and upset the cart!"

The eternal dread and dislike of genius! And yet that very evening Burton had shown qualities of prudence and wisdom far beyond Lytton's comprehension.

But I must hasten. I found myself in Venice once with time on my hands, when I suddenly remembered that across the sea at Trieste was a man who would always make a meeting memorable. I took the next steamer and called on Burton. I found the desert lion dying of the cage; dying of disappointment and neglect; dying because there was no field for the exercise of his superlative abilities; dying because the soul in him could find nothing to live on in Trieste; for in spite of his talent for literature, in spite of his extraordinary gift of speech, Burton was at bottom a man of action, a great leader, a still greater governor of men.

While out walking one afternoon we stopped at a little café, and I had an object-lesson in Burton's mastery of life. His German was quite good, but nothing like his Italian. He seemed to know the people of the inn and every one about by intuition,

and in a few minutes had won their confidence and admiration. For half an hour he talked to a delighted audience in Dante's speech, jewelled with phrases from the great Florentine himself. As we walked back to his house he suddenly cried to me:

"Make some excuse and take me out tonight; if I don't get out I shall go mad. . . ."

We had a great night—Burton giving pictures of his own life; telling of his youth in the Indian Army when he wandered about among the natives disguised as a native (I have always thought of him as the original of Kipling's "Strickland"). His fellow-officers, of course, hated his superiority: called him in derision "the white nigger"; Burton laughed at it all, fully compensated, he said, for their hatred by the love and admiration of Sir Charles Napier (*Peccavi,* "I have Scinde," Napier), hero recognizing hero. It was to Napier, and at Napier's request, that he sent the famous "report" which, falling into secretarial hands, put an end to any chance of Burton's advancement in India—the tragedy again and again repeated of a great life maimed and marred by envious, eyeless mediocrities. What might have been, what would have been had he been given power —a new earth if not a new heaven—the theme of his inspired Report.

I got him to talk, too, about *The Scented Garden,* which he had been working at for some time. Lady

Burton afterwards burnt this book, it will be remembered, together with his priceless diaries, out of sheer prudery. He told me (what I had already guessed) that the freedom of speech he used, he used deliberately, not to shock England, but to teach England that only by absolute freedom of speech and thought could she ever come to be worthy of her heritage.

"But I'm afraid it's too late," he added; "England's going to some great defeat; she's wedded to lies and mediocrities." . . . He got bitter again, and I wished to turn his thoughts.

"Which would you really have preferred to be," I probed, "Viceroy of India or Consul-General of Egypt?"

"Egypt, Egypt!" he cried, starting up, "Egypt! In India I should have had the English Civil Servants to deal with—the Jangalí, or savages, as their Hindu fellow-subjects call them—and English prejudices, English formalities, English stupidity, English ignorance. They would have killed me in India, thwarted me, fought me, intrigued against me, murdered me. But in Egypt I could have made my own Civil servants, picked them out, and trained them. I could have had natives, too, to help. Ah, what a chance!

"I know Arabic better than I know Hindu. Arabic is my native tongue; I know it as well as I know English. I know the Arab nature. The Mahdi

business could have been settled without striking a blow. If Gordon had known Arabic well, spoken it as a master, he would have won the Mahdi to friendship. To govern well you must know a people —know their feelings, love their dreams and aspirations. What did Dufferin know of Egypt? Poor Dufferin, what did he even know of Dufferin? And Cromer's devoid even of Dufferin's amiability!"

The cold words do him wrong, give no hint of the flame and force of his disappointment; but I can never forget the bitter sadness of it: "England finds nothing for me to do, makes me an office-boy, exiles me here on a pittance." The caged lion!

I have always thought that these two men, Carlyle and Burton, were the two greatest governors ever given to England. The one for England herself, and as an example to the world of the way to turn a feudal, chivalrous State into a great modern industrial State; the other the best possible governor of Mohammedan peoples—two more prophets whom England did not stone, did not even take the trouble to listen to. She is still paying, as I have said, somewhat dearly for her adders' ears and must yet pay still more heavily.

I have found fault with Carlyle because he was a Puritan, deaf to music, blind to beauty. Burton went to the other extreme: he was a sensualist of extravagant appetite learned in every Eastern and savage

vice. His coarse, heavy, protruding lips were to me sufficient explanation of the pornographic learning of his *Arabian Nights*. And when age came upon him; though a quarter of what he was accustomed to eat in his prime would have kept him in perfect health, he yielded to the habitual desire and suffered agonies with indigestion, dying, indeed, in a fit of dyspepsia brought on by over-eating. And with these untamed appetites and desires he was peculiarly sceptical and practical; his curiosity all limited to this world, which accounts to me for his infernal pedantry. He never seemed to realize that wisdom has nothing to do with knowledge, literature nothing to do with learning. Knowledge and learning, facts, are but the raw food of experience, and literature is concerned only with experience itself. A child of the mystical East, a master of that Semitic thought which has produced the greatest religions, Burton was astoundingly matter-of-fact. There was no touch of the visionary in him—the curious analogies everywhere discoverable in things disparate, the chemical reactions of passion, the astounding agreement between mathematical formulæ and the laws of love and hatred, the myriad provoking hints, like eyes glinting through a veil, that tempt the poet to dreaming, the artist to belief, were all lost on Burton. He was a master of this life and cared nothing for any other; his disbelief was characteristically bold and emphatic. He wrote:

The shivered clock again shall strike, the broken reed shall
pipe again,
But we, we die, and Death is one, the doom of Brutes, the
doom of Men.

But, with all his limitations and all his shortcomings, Burton's place was an Eastern throne and not the ignoble routine of a petty Consular office.

At length the good hour came; he died,
As he had lived alone:
He was not missed from the desert wide,
Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE publication of Meredith's letters has been a literary event: they appear to have surprised the general public and touched it to unwonted regret. In a peculiar way, they have set the seal upon a reputation which has been growing now for over sixty years, since the appearance indeed of his first novels and poems. Fifty years ago Carlyle noticed his work, and his fame widened with every book, took on a ring, so to speak, every year, and grew slowly as trees grow which are destined to last for centuries. In the eighties, when Meredith was well over fifty, the younger generation began to speak of him with reverence; to us he stood with Browning and Swinburne among the Immortals. But Browning lived a life apart and held himself aloof from men of letters and journalists; while Swinburne showed every now and then a vehemence of anger and a deplorable extravagance of speech which made one almost ashamed of even his generous and clear-sighted judgments. Those of us who had the honor and the delight of knowing Meredith personally had seldom anything to forgive him; we knew that he was not only one of the greatest of English letter-

writers, not only a splendid creative artist and poet, but something more even than that; a most noble and inspiring personality, perhaps the widest and deepest mind born in England since Blake.

I could give many instances of his generosity and sympathy, the eagerness with which he championed any cause or person that seemed to him worthy, or merely in need of help; but I must content myself with one, and thus pay a personal debt.

Shortly after I was appointed editor of *The Fortnightly* I wrote my first short stories, and, as some friends spoke well of them, I showed them to Frederic Chapman, the managing director of Chapman and Hall, who controlled the review. He liked them and wished me to publish them: accordingly, I published *The Modern Idyll* in *The Fortnightly*. It was bitterly attacked by the unco' guid: the Rev. Newman Hall wrote a furious letter about it, and, to my amazement, *The Spectator,* for which I had written for years, joined in the hue and cry with peculiar malevolence. The result was that the directors of Chapman and Hall met and instructed me not to insert any more of my stories in the review. I saw them, and, without giving Frederic Chapman away, told them what I thought of their literary judgment and handed them my resignation. Frederic Chapman begged me to reconsider the matter, but I was obstinate. A day or two afterwards Chapman came to me and told me that Meredith was in his

room, and that he was praising my story enthusiastically: "Would I come across and see him?"

I was naturally eager to see the king of contemporary writers, and jumped at the opportunity. As Meredith got up from the arm-chair to greet me, I was astonished by the Greek beauty of his face set off by wavy silver hair and the extraordinary vivacity of ever-changing expression, astonished, too, by the high, loud voice which he used in ordinary conversation, and by the quick-glancing eyes which never seemed to rest for a moment on any object, but flitted about curiously, like a child's. The bright quick eyes seemed to explain Meredith's style to me, and give the key to his mind. The good fairies had dowered this man at birth with a profusion of contradictory gifts—beauty of face and strength of body and piercing intelligence. They had given him artistic perceptions as well as high courage; generosity and sweetness of soul together with great self-control—all the enthusiasms and idealisms, and yet both feet steadfast on Mother Earth in excellent balance. But the bad fairy, who couldn't prevent him seeing everything, could hinder him from dwelling patiently on insignificant things, or what seemed insignificant to him; the eyes flitted hither and thither butterfly fashion, and the style danced about for vanity's sake to keep the eyes company.

But at the moment I was more impressed by the kindly humanity of the man than even by his genius.

As soon as he heard what had happened he declared he would see the directors himself; "Perhaps they will listen to me," he cried, with friendliest interest; "they mustn't be allowed to stand in our light," he added, with a humorous twinkle. Frederic Chapman told me afterwards that Meredith had come up to London on purpose to speak for me to the directors, and he soon induced them to recall their insulting notice.

I am proud to put on record this instance of Meredith's kindness to an unknown stranger, for such human sympathy is rare indeed among English writers. So far as I know, Meredith was the only man of his generation who took the high responsibilities of genius seriously: an uncrowned king, he never forgot that sympathetic kindness to juniors and inferiors was a duty of his position.

I could fill a book with instances of his generous appreciations and helpful kindness; but I cannot resist the temptation to reproduce here the conclusion of one of his letters to me just to give an idea of the familiar charm and sweet-natured tact of his friendship. He had written asking me why I hadn't brought out a book which had been announced? The public, I replied, didn't care for my work, and the illiterate prudery of the Press was revolting. He wrote at once calling on me to pay no attention to the malice of journalists or the religiosity of the

feeble-minded. The letter was in the strain of Mary Coleridge's famous verse:

> Narrow not thy walk to keep
> Pace with those who, half asleep,
> Judge thee now. . . .

and it ended with the encouragement of his own example:

> "I am an old offender before the public. There were meetings at Book Clubs headed by clergy over the country to denounce R. Feverel as an immoral production. The good beast is doubtful of the smell of me still, and, as I am not guided by his opinion, you must take the fact to weigh in the scales against my judgment.
>
> "Yours ever,
>
> "George Meredith."

Again and again he cheered younger ones to the work, and whenever anybody wrote to him he answered at once, and always with the enthusiasm that regards difficulties as rungs of the ladder. One might have thought he had nothing else to do but play good Samaritan and encourage the faint-hearted.

His own courage was of the finest. In 1896 he wrote to me that he had come up to London for an operation. A foolish fear seized me: I realized what it would mean to lose him. I called at once

and found him in bed laughing and chatting with friends who had come to see him. Evidently he was ready and willing to face the worst. No need even for resolution: he had accustomed himself to look upon the Arch-Fear as a friend. Nothing finer could be imagined or wished: "Science has abolished pain," he said gaily, "and with pain even the need of steeling oneself: the doctors have made the ford easy, we can't even feel the chill of the water." It was good to meet the old hero and find him superior to his fate, light-hearted indeed, knowing that, whatever happened, he had fought a great fight and won many a victory.

Now and again, however, little disappointments came to show me he was human.

Talking one day about his French Odes, which I admired, "Aylwin" was mentioned, and to my amazement he praised parts of it. That he should even have been able to read the drivel made me gasp: but Theodore Watts-Dunton as a writer for *The Athenæum* had a certain influence: the question imposed itself: did Meredith care so much for popularity? Yet I had only to get on a larger subject with him to find at once the imperial sweep of mind, like a broad landscape on the downs when you can see over the hills the wide expanse of sea meeting the reach of sky. It is curious that the little weaknesses, even the faults of those we love, do not touch our affection or even diminish our reverence. Often

indeed they make the character dearer to us, more human, more lovable.

But there are differences of opinion which go deeper, and after ten years' friendship I was at length to meet one of these in Meredith.

The incident may be put on record, though it stands alone, because every close reader of his works, and especially of his poetry, will admit that it was eminently characteristic. All the world knows that Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labor; but very few have heard that this punishment had been previously condemned as inhuman by a Royal Commission. Acting on the suggestion of the Commission that the frightful sentence should always be mitigated I got up a petition for the remission of part of the term. I was informed on good authority that if Meredith headed the petition and I could get five or six other men of letters to support the request, the Government would grant it without further ado. I jumped at the chance, feeling sure I had only to ask Meredith to get his consent; but to my astonishment he replied that he couldn't do as I wished, and when I pressed him to let me see him on the matter, he answered that he would rather not meet me for such a purpose as his mind was made up. I was simply dumbfounded, and at a complete loss. I knew it was not courage that was lacking, or want of imagination: what could be the reason? When I turned elsewhere

and failed I was not astonished; how could I be angry with the sheep when the bell-wether had played false.

A little later I made it my business to meet Meredith as if by chance and have it out with him. To my amazement he defended his want of sympathy: abnormal sensuality in a leader of men, he said, was a crime, and should be punished with severity. Again and again he repeated that all greatness was based on morality, that immorality and *a fortiori,* abnormal immorality was a proof of degeneracy; Wilde was "an arrested development"; he became emphatic, loud, rhetorical. On the other hand, I argued that abnormal vice was a monomania and should be treated as a mental aberration: it wasn't catching; one didn't punish cripples and so on. He wouldn't listen; as he had said his mind was made up, and at length I had to accept the fact that a hero could allow the maimed and deformed on his own side to be tortured by the enemy.

It has since been pointed out to me that Meredith's poems discover the same relentless, stoic severity; but the explanation did not interest me greatly. Meredith as a leader of thought and men died for me then, and my sorrow was embittered with impatient disdain. The foremost Englishman after twenty centuries had not climbed to the Christ height.

There is something to be said in his excuse; though not much. He had a poor opinion of Oscar Wilde's

writings, he would not hear of placing him in the front rank; he was a *poseur* he said. Wilde had laughed at his obscurity and tortuous style in one of his Essays; but I was convinced that that circumstance had nothing consciously to do with Meredith's attitude. Meredith was so noble and lovable that no mean suspicion could attach to his misjudging.

The truth is, he had scant appreciation for Wilde's extraordinary sweetness of nature and exquisite sunny humor; probably he had never known him at all intimately. But to me the fact remained that he had defended the barbarous punishment of a man of genius when punishment was wholly indefensible.

For some years I had no further communication with him: I could not even write to him: I should have had to probe the wound: why did he act so? How could he? I couldn't think of "the great refusal" dispassionately.

A little later Meredith gave me another shock of surprise and disappointment, followed by just as impatient and certain condemnation. In the South African dispute he persisted in saying that there were faults on both sides. While admitting that the war was unnecessary and that the British were chiefly to blame, he proposed coolly that Johannesburg and the mines should be taken from the Boers. The other day when the Hon. Alfred Lyttleton died, it was said of him in eulogy that he was an ideal

Englishman, who always held with "his own people, right or wrong." It really seems as if Englishmen are fated to be insular, provincial even, whenever their own country is concerned. Meredith saw certain virtues of stubborn manfulness in the Boers; but he had no right notion of them in relation to the British emigrants and the future of South Africa, no realization of the fact that foreign miners can hardly be regarded as bona fide settlers, and that German Jew financiers are not apt to be good rulers.

He took it for granted that the Boers maltreated the Kaffirs, and that their civilization was far lower than ours. When I asked him to protest against the dreadful mortality in the Concentration Camps, he told me that he didn't believe the mortality could be lessened. He protested, it is true, in the *Daily News* and elsewhere against some of the worst excesses of the British during the war; but he seemed to have no idea that the burning of peaceable farmhouses was barbarous, and that no civilized people except the British had been guilty of such a crime in the last hundred years. The awful mortality in the Concentration Camps cannot be explained away, and the whole policy remains as a blot on the English name for ever.

But it was impossible to be angry with Meredith for long. His faults were so manifestly faults due to his birth and training that one simply had to forgive and forget them. It is almost impossible for

an Englishman to reach the impartiality frequently shown by distinguished men of other races. It may, of course, be argued that the strength and success of the English come from just this inability to see a foreigner's point of view and sympathize with it. But the Romans tried patriotism instead of humanity and found it fail them, and it may be that the British will yet come to grief for the same reason.

However that may be, the fact is that in the South African War no Englishmen of note, with the exception of Mr. Frederic Harrison, and Mr. Bernard Shaw, were at all able to judge events impartially, and they were imperfectly acquainted with the Boers and their desires.

It is scarcely possible to hope that any man will always rise superior to the prejudices of his race and upbringing. In nine cases out of ten Meredith stood for the right, even when the right was unpopular.

At the very commencement of the agitation for Women's Suffrage he struck in for the women and their demands in whole-hearted fashion. His shortcomings even were not shortcomings of character or of courage.

About this time, at seventy-four or five years of age, he began to talk as if his work were done and the account settled. But later still I met him again; and found his mind as vivacious as it had been twenty years before. In particular I remember one afternoon above his house on Box Hill when he was

being driven in his little donkey-chair. I went over and spoke to him and found him the same as ever, as friendly and clear-sighted and affectionate as in the earlier days.

His letters show one that up to the very end his intellect was as keen, his perception as fine, and his judgment as sure as ever. They contain, indeed, the finest criticism in the language. Here is how he ranks himself:

> Men to whom I bow my head (Shakespeare, Goethe, and, in their way, Molière, Cervantes) are Realists *au fond*. But they have the broad arms of Idealism at command. They give us Earth; but it is earth with an atmosphere.

And here is Victor Hugo judged by a master:

> On re-reading V. Hugo's *Les Cymbaliers du Roi* I am confirmed in a cloyed sensation I first experienced. The alliteration is really so persistent that the ears feel as if they had been horribly drummed on. Power of narrative, I see. Mimetic power of a wonderful kind and flow of verse; also extraordinary. I am not touched by any new music in it. I do not find any comprehension of human nature, or observation, or sympathy with it. I perceive none of the subtleties, deep but unobtrusive, that show that a mind has travelled. Great windy phrases, and what I must term (for they so hit my sense) encaustic imageries, do not satisfy me any longer, though I remember a period when they did. . . .
>
> The article on the "Travailleurs de la Mer" is Morley's.

I think it scarcely does justice to the miraculous descriptive power. The Storm is amazing: I have never read anything like it. It is next to Nature in force and vividness. Hugo rolls the sea and sweeps the heavens; the elements are in his hands. He is the largest son of his mother earth in this time present. Magnificent in conception, unsurpassed—leagues beyond us all—in execution. Not (nur Schade!) a philosopher. There's the pity. With a philosophic brain, as well as his marvellous poetic energy, he would stand in the front rank of glorious men for ever.

This word about English prose hits the centre:

The prose in Shakespeare and in Congreve is perfect. Apart from drama, Swift is a great exemplar; Bolingbroke, and in his mild tea-table way, Addison, follow. Johnson and Macaulay wielded bludgeons; they had not the strength that can be supple.

And the masters of his own time are judged from the same height:

I can hardly say I think Tennyson deserves well of us; he is a real singer, and he sings this mild fluency to this great length. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* is preferable. Fancy one affecting the great poet and giving himself up (in our days—he must have lost the key of them) to such dandiacal fluting. . . . The praises of the book shut me away from my fellows. To be sure, there's the magnificent "Lucretius."

I return Ruskin's letter, a characteristic one. It is the spirituality of Carlyle that charms him. What he says

of Tennyson I too thought in my boy's days—that is, before I began to think: Tennyson has many spiritual indications, but no philosophy, and philosophy is the palace of thought.

In another letter he writes with proper disdain of Ruskin's "monstrous assumption of wisdom."

His judgment of Carlyle is magnificent and kindly:

He was the greatest of the Britons of his time—and after the British fashion of not coming near perfection; Titanic, not Olympian; a heaver of rocks, not a shaper. But if he did not perfect work, he had lightning's power to strike out marvellous pictures and reach to the inmost of men with a phrase. . . .

In reading Carlyle, bear in mind that he is a humorist. The insolence offensive to you is part of his humour. He means what he says, but only as far as a humorist can mean what he says. See the difference between him and Emerson, who is, on the contrary, a philosopher. The humorist, notwithstanding, has much truth to back him. Swim on his pages, take his poetry and fine grisly laughter, his manliness, together with some splendid teaching. I don't agree with Carlyle a bit—but I do enjoy him.

And this superb defence of the Good and True in the shape of advice to his son:

The Bible is outspoken upon facts, and rightly. It is because the world is stupidly shamefaced that it cannot

come into contact with the Bible without convulsions. I agree that the Book should be read out, for Society is a hypocrite, and I would accommodate her in nothing; though for the principle of Society I hold that men should be ready to lay down their lives. Belief in religion has done and does this good to the young; it floats them through the perilous period when the appetites most need control and transmutation. If you have not the belief, set yourself to love virtue by understanding that it is your best guide, both as to what is due to others, and what is for your positive personal good. If your mind honestly rejects it, you must call on your mind to supply its place from your own resources. Otherwise you will have only half done your work, and that is mischievous. You know how Socrates loved truth. Truth and virtue are one. Look for the truth in everything, and follow it, and you will then be living justly before God. Let nothing flout your sense of a Supreme Being, and be certain that your understanding wavers whenever you chance to doubt that He leads to good. We grow to good as surely as the plant grows to the light.

Again and again these letters show flashes of Shakespearean insight: all his letters to Lady Ulrica Duncombe (and most especially his letter in defence of the sensual passion of his own *Diana of the Crossways)* are quite extraordinary. He sees that Lady Ulrica, like most English women, "is kindled more martially than amorously; not so much softened as elevated." He talks superbly of woman's courage as "elastic," subject to ups and downs, that is; but

always finding strength again in her affections; he will not have man or woman condemned rigorously for a sensual slip; he would have marriage modified, shocked England indeed by proposing to legalize marriage with a time limit, say of ten years: declared against himself that "it is not wholesome even for great men to be adored while they breathe"; deplored the fact that "the English don't want their novels to be thoughtful, the characters to be deeply studied," positively preferring conventional surface sketches: and à propos of something in the South African War he tells his countrymen that "their apathy to their evil deeds is not only a crime, but perceptibly written by history as the cause of national disaster." On every page indeed he shows, to use his own phrase, "a mind that has travelled."

When seventy-seven years of age he concluded that "England has little criticism beyond the expression of personal likes or dislikes, the stout vindication of an old conservatism of taste"; and he adds, "I have seen many reviews, not one criticism of my books in prose or verse." Was there ever such a condemnation of English men of letters?

The last letter is on the same high level. It was called forth by the death of Swinburne, and is boyishly enthusiastic:

"Song was his natural voice. He was the greatest of our lyrical poets—of the world I could say,

considering what a language he had to wield." But many years before he had put his finger on the poet's weakness:

> Swinburne is not subtle; and I don't see any internal centre from which springs anything that he does. He will make a great name, but whether he is to distinguish himself solidly as an artist I would not willingly prognosticate.

No greatness seemed to escape him; his judgments even of Russian writers show the same intuitive appreciation.

It was characteristic of him, I think, that he underrated German literature; probably because it is a little weak in the romantic and heroic elements he most prized and because he is not a master of the language. But he would have praised the Niebelungen Lied and the poems of Wolfram von Eschenbach and Heine had he known them. Again and again we find him coupling Goethe with Shakespeare with significant assurance.

Take him for all in all there is no greater figure in English literature, except Shakespeare himself; in spite of his imperfect accomplishment Meredith should rank with Emerson and Blake among our noblest. I do not care much for his novels, one can get his mind better through his poems, and best of all though these letters. But certain of his poems will live as long as the language, and there are

pages of his novels, such as the love-idyll in *Richard Feverel,* which are of the same quality. Here is a short poem almost as fine as Goethe's best; indeed it is almost a rendering of the magical verse beginning: Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh.[1]

DIRGE IN WOODS

A wind sways the pines
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine tree drops its dead;
They are quiet as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so.

[1] I have Englished this verse so that my readers may compare the two masters; but my rendering is shockingly inferior to the original.

O'er all the hilltops is silence now,
From all the forest hearest thou
Hardly a breath.
The birds in the woodlands are nesting.
Patience—soon thou will be resting
Gently in Death.

I have given his written judgments of his literary contemporaries at some length because they show, I think, the ripest critical faculty to be found in any literature. This man, one would say, had the widest, fairest mind imaginable: it fails nowhere. If one compares him with the best critics so called, his superiority is astounding: matched with him the Hazlitts and Sainte Beuves are pigmies: Swinburne continually overshoots the mark in praise or blame: Matthew Arnold is snobbish, and petty and hidebound: Emerson is puritanical; even Goethe lacks the subtle sureness of appreciation, the vivid painting phrases. Shakespeare alone has the same imperial vision wedded to magic of expression.

These *Letters* give me the same sense of fullness as Meredith's wonderful talk; I have often come away from him feeling that on everything we had discussed his judgment was final. I have never met so fine a mind, so perfect a mirror; were it not for that harshness of moral condemnation of which I have given an instance, and that bias of insular patriotism, I should have said that in Meredith, as in Shakespeare, one touched the zenith of humanity.

In these crucial matters he fell short of the ideal. In virile virtues he was better endowed than Shakespeare: he had loved passionately, but had not lost himself in passion: he had fought again and again for unpopular causes and had stood against the

world for the Right with heroic courage: he had accepted all the conditions of life without murmur or complaint, and had triumphed over all difficulties; he had lived in poverty without cringing or revolt; one of our Conquerors for all time; after a more desperate battle than Browning waged he had won to greater sweetness of nature. I call him a great man and a noble, not so great as Shakespeare, who rose above race-vanity and above condemnation of even the worst of men to those heights where "pardon's the word to all" and where malice itself can only mean forgiveness. But Meredith's life and being are witness enough that this age of ours is the noblest age in all history, for he did not dwarf his contemporaries and his stature is proof sufficient that men will yet be born on earth greater than any of our models. Nature is always surpassing herself, and her most prodigious achievement today but prepares a nobler accomplishment tomorrow.

It is worth notice perhaps that Meredith did not pass almost unrecognized through life as Shakespeare passed and Cervantes. He was fairly well known to a good many of us. Barrie and Max Beerbohm wrote of him during his lifetime as the greatest man since Shakespeare: Lord Morley took care that he should have the Order of Merit, and though his novels never had a large sale and his poems hardly covered the cost of publication, all the best readers in the English-speaking lands were his de-

voted and enthusiastic friends and admirers. He was the one writer of the time of whom we were all proud. He went through life crowned, and nothing he said or did injured his reputation or tarnished the sovereign lustre of his genius. He was poor with dignity and a friend of man without affectation or snobbishness: his joy in living, his sympathy, his happy valiance made life brighter to all of us.

ROBERT BROWNING

IT was as a student in Göttingen that I first got to know Robert Browning. The passion of the lyrics "The Last Ride Together," "In a Gondola," and many others enthralled me, and the "Men and Women" taught me that the great lover was a great man to boot; but it was "The Ring and the Book" which gave me his measure, allowed me, so to speak, to lay my ear to the page and listen to Browning's heart beat. Curiously enough, a little thing became a sort of symbol of my liking for the man, the generous kindly warmth of his dedications to John Kenyon and Barry Cornwall and Sergeant Talfourd. The world knows little about these almost forgotten worthies, but just because of that the notices reminded me of Balzac's numerous dedications, and everything connected with Balzac, however remote, has a certain significance for me. For Balzac is one of the "Sacred Band" who has enlarged one's conception of human capacity and given new horizons to the spirit. Browning profited by this connection, and when some years later I came to London to work I hoped to meet the poet who was at least half a seer as a poet should be. I used to call Browning

to myself "Greatheart," for his courage and confidence and hope, and as "Greatheart" I often spoke of him.

One day, I think in 1888 or 1889, I went to lunch at Lady Shrewsbury's. It was a large party; an earl was on the right of the hostess and a prominent Member of the House of Commons on her left: opposite me, about the middle of the table, was a small man inclined to be stout, carefully dressed, with healthy tanned skin, blue eyes and silver hair. He had a red tie on, and to my shortsightedness seemed commonplace. Suddenly some one addressed him as Mr. Browning. Breathless I turned to my neighbor, a lady: "Is that Robert Browning the poet?" I asked in wonder. "I think so," she replied, a little surprised at my tone, "he's nice, isn't he? But I'm afraid I don't know much about poetry: I don't care for it really: I'm not literary." I hardly heard her chatter: so that was Robert Browning: I gazed and gazed, studied his face, his eyes, his expression; but could not *see* anything: his eyes were blue and clear, his nose a little beaked; but there was nothing distinguished about him, I had to admit to myself, nothing peculiar even, nothing remarkable. Of course, I took myself to task at once: "What had I expected, a giant or an ogre?" "No, no," my heart replied, "yet I had hoped to catch in eyes or expression something to

show the greatness of the spirit; but nothing, nothing."

He spoke to his neighbors in a low tone, kept the quiet manners and reserve of the ordinary gentleman, using politeness perhaps as a barrier between himself and the world.

I was introduced to him, and told him how glad I was to meet him; how his work had delighted me. He bowed as if I had been using ordinary conventional phrases and turned away, his cool, indifferent manner fencing him off from my enthusiastic admiration. I could get nothing from him, no glint of fire from the polished flint.

I met him again and again that season, but never got inside his armor. Once or twice I had hardly spoken to him, I had contented myself with bowing, so convinced I was that it was impossible to enter into intimate relations with him.

One day I was at Mrs. Jeune's at lunch. On her right she had Russell Lowell, the American Ambassador: on her left a Cabinet Minister. I was at the other end of the table, on the left of the host, who had Browning on his right hand. The conversation at our end of the table was formal and dull, but Russell Lowell was in great form and kept the table interested and amused to judge by the laughter of the pretty women.

At the end of lunch Russell Lowell got up to go, excusing himself, and the bevy of women all gath-

ered about him talking and laughing. It made a good picture, Lowell with his leonine grey head, bright and happy as a schoolboy, and the women flirting with him with that happy mixture of confidence and familiarity that young women often show distinguished men on the verge of old age.

I had gone round to Browning's side of the table. I don't know how the conversation commenced, but I remember quoting in illustration of something I said, a verse of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* with passionate appreciation.

Suddenly there came a peal of laughter from the other end of the room. Lowell, exclaiming "the one privilege of age," was kissing the pretty hands extended to him when taking his leave. Suddenly Browning clutched my arm.

"But what has he done," he said, indicating Lowell with his head at the other end of the room, "what has he done to be so fêted?"

The tone was so angry, so bitter, that I started.

"He has lived for just that," I replied, "that is why he made verse and not poetry. He wanted the facile admiration of the moment and the liking of pretty women: he has got them. But there are three or four who honor you at this table, who don't care whether Lowell is alive or dead."

"One tries to console oneself with thoughts like that," Browning admitted, "but it is difficult as one grows older. When one is young, one is so occupied

with the work that one doesn't much care whether it is liked or disliked, but later, when one has fought and had, at any rate, a partial success, it is hard to see others who have not fought at all, put before one."

Naturally I did my best to show him the other side. I spoke to him of the enthusiastic admiration of the little group of literary students at Heidelberg and Göttingen, who thought more of him than of any living poet. His only competitor in our admiration, I told him, was Victor Hugo; if he had paid a visit to Germany we should have chaired him through the streets. He appeared to be gratified.

We went away together and walked, I remember, across the park, and from that day on I began to know him. I soon found that all he had to give he had given in his books: in fact, I came to see that the poetry, the mere words, or, if you will, the inspiration of the moment had lent him thoughts beyond his seeing.

Take this verse in which he shows that injustice, or wrong may have a good result as a spur:

> Then, welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
> Be our joys three-parts pain!
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge
> the throe!

Or this one with its lofty optimism:

> Therefore I summon age
> To grant youth's heritage,
> Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
> Thence shall I pass, approved
> A man, for aye removed
> From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

Here is the heart of his song and it is mere Christian:

> Not once beat "Praise be Thine!
> "I see the whole design,
> "I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
> "Perfect I call Thy plan:
> "Thanks that I was a man!
> "Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do!"

No honest human soul can call the plan "perfect." Browning was certainly bigger in his writings than he was in intimacy. He is often spoken of as the least inspired of poets. To my mind he owed more to verse and the inspiration of reflection than any man of genius I ever met. His belief as shown in the *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and other poems is uncompromising, definite, clear, authoritative as the utterance of a Jewish prophet. But when you probed the man in quiet conversation, you found no such certainty.

His beliefs were really a mere echo of his childhood's faith, and his optimism was of health and sound heart rather than of insight. He was not one of those who had gone round the world and returned to his native place; he had always lingered in the vicinity of home without seeking to justify his preference. His was a bookish mind, and apart from books not eventfully original. He had spent many years in Italy without knowing the Italian, and had lived on the crater-edge of socialist unrest almost without noticing it. Unfortunately for his fame he had always had a competence, enough to live on comfortably and so had never to struggle with the necessities and learn their lesson. Had he ever gone hungry and been forced to eat "the bitter-salt bread" of humiliation that Dante spoke of he might have become a world-poet. As it was he accepted all the pitiable conventions of London society because he was used to them, just as he donned the dress. I have heard him tell a fairly good story; I never heard him say anything original. In fact, if I had not known his poetry I should have met him and talked to him many times without ever imagining that he was a man of any distinction of mind.

Of course, all this may well be my fault: something in me may have displeased him: I sought to explain it to myself by saying we were not of the same generation. For Frederic Harrison gives a dif-

ferent picture of him, speaks of him as "genial, full of story and jest"; but even he, who finds something good to say of all the men of that time, does not record anything remarkable of Robert Browning.

Again and again I tried to find out something about the married life of the Brownings; it was hardly possible that two sensitive poets should have lived together for twenty years in perfect harmony, but till lately I never heard an authentic word on the subject. A short time ago, however, I met a relative of the Tennysons who told me that she had heard from the poet laureate that the Brownings often quarrelled like ordinary folk, and the root of their disagreement was usually the jealousy he felt when his wife's poetry was overpraised. I am not inclined to attribute much weight to this report. I think it may be taken that, on the whole, the Brownings lived happily together, and so far as I could learn, his faithfulness was not even questioned in scandal-loving London. It is certain that Browning spoke of his wife to the very end with fanatical admiration.

What a wretched silhouette this is to give of Robert Browning; what a poor thin sketch! It would have been better, I think I hear the reader say, to have said nothing at all about him. Yet I cannot agree with this; if I failed to get near Browning it was not through lack of desire on my part, or lack of sympathy. My utter failure simply shows how hard

it is for us to know our fellow-men rightly even when we approach them in the best spirit. Yet the magic of his noble optimism and the music of his verse are always with me:

> Rejoice we are allied
> To That which doth provide
> And not partake, effect and not receive!
> A spark disturbs our clod;
> Nearer we hold of God
> Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

The failure to find anything heroic or wise or of deepest humanity in Browning should simply warn the reader that the mirror of my soul held up for these reflections is after all a poor clouded mirror, dulled with fog of life and stained with soilure of earth, untrustworthy even at its brightest.

SWINBURNE: THE POET OF YOUTH AND REVOLT

SWINBURNE is dead; and a part of our youth seems to have passed with him, to have dropped into the dim backward and abysm of Time. The natural regret is overpowered by the insurgent thrill of memory. Swinburne was the hot voice of youth and the joy of living, the cry of revolt against the smug Victorian respectability, and the syrupy creed of Tennyson. For many years he was the most vital thing in England, and naturally, in English fashion, the authorities passed him by and made a lackey, laureate in his place. The soul of the new paganism was in him, which is the soul of yesterday and today and many a day to come. With right instinct the whole cry of ha'penny critics is quoting "The Garden of Proserpine" with its pagan hopelessness:

> From too much love of living,
> From hope and fear set free,
> We thank with brief thanksgiving,
> Whatever Gods may be,

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY HOLLYER, PORTRAIT
BY G. F. WATTS

That no life lives for ever,
That dead men rise up never,
That even the weariest river,
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

And the passion of paganism, too, he rendered again and again, deathlessly (though the journalists are afraid to quote it) in "The Leper" and "Faustine," and perhaps most characteristically in these lines from "Anactoria," where Sappho herself aches for fulfilment.

Alas, that neither moon nor snow nor dew,
Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through,
Assuage me, nor allay me, nor appease,
Till supreme sleep shall bring me bloodless ease,
Till time wax faint in all his periods,
Till Fate undo the bondage of the Gods;
And lay to slake and satiate me all through,
Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew,
And shed around and over and under me
Thick darkness and the insuperable sea.

But Swinburne was more than a poet of passion and despair, he has turned into incomparable music all the culture and idealisms, the faiths and follies of youth, and it is this which gives him European importance, and makes him more interesting than a Leopardi or a Verlaine.

The choruses of the "Atalanta in Calydon" lent to English for the first time the plangent syllabifica-

tion and sonorous melody of the best work of Sophocles or Euripides; the beat and music of the verse are irresistible:

> Before the beginning of years
> There came to the making of man
> Time with a gift of tears;
> Grief with a glass that ran.

And

> Eyesight and speech they wrought
> As veils of the soul therein,
> A time for labour and thought,
> A time to serve and to sin.

Who can ever forget the lament of Meleager and the glorious answer of Atalanta:

> I would that with feet
> Unsandall'd, unshod,
> Overbold, overfleet,
> I had swum not, nor trod
> From Arcadia to Calydon northward
> A blast of the envy of God!

What did it matter to us that the phrase "A blast of the envy of God" was taken from Euripides; it had a new weight in English, an added value.

Goethe himself never gave nobler music to Pantheism than Swinburne did in "Hertha."

I am that which began.
Out of me the years roll,
Out of me God and man—
I am equal and whole.
God changes and Man, and the form of them
Bodily:
I am the soul.

. . . . .

But what dost thou now
Looking Godward to cry,
"I am I; Thou art Thou;
I am low; Thou art high."
I am thou whom thou seekest to find,
Find thou but thyself, Thou art I.

I the seed that is sown,
And the plough-cloven clod,
And the ploughshare drawn thorough
The germ and the sod,
The seed and the sower, the deed and the doer,
The dust which is God!

All the hero-worship of youth is in Swinburne, magnificently rendered in the poems to Landor, Hugo, Gautier, and Blake, and in the prose poems to Shakespeare and Scott. All obvious, fixed stars, one might object, but that, too, is youth's way, and is right so far as it goes. The deathless faith in man and the Kingdom of Man upon earth; the passion for equality, and the superb contempt for popes and

crowns and false values—all youth's idealisms and revolts set to glorious music once for all, and made imperishable. Swinburne was the poet of youth, and his heritage is as wide as the world, and his lovers as numerous as the sands of the sea, for all youths will love him and quote him with hot hearts and passionate tears so long as English is spoken.

Before I ever met Swinburne I had a certain image of him in my mind, a sort of composite photograph built up partly from his verses and even more from talks about him with men who had known him intimately. Whistler in particular, I remember, had given me a snapshot of him when he lived in Cheyne Walk with Rossetti—an inimitable unforgettable silhouette etched into a grotesque, as if the gall-acid had run upon the plate broadening the lines and deepening the shadows to caricature. He told of the weird sitting room turned into a menagerie of wild beasts by Rossetti into which Swinburne burst one summer morning, naked as the day he was born, wild with enthusiasm over some Greek verses he had just discovered which he insisted upon chanting with frantic gestures: "There he was," Whistler concluded, "swimming about like a blonde Bacchante drunken with sound." I only give the sketch to warn my readers that every one of us carries to a meeting with any of the immortals certain preconceived ideas and prejudgments which twist and tinge the impression they make on us. In

order to give a true image, a perfect representment, the mind at such a time ought to be a pure sensitized plate; but it is not; it is a plate, so to speak, already scratched with innumerable lines and warped in a hundred fires, and even the image thus received cannot be reproduced with perfect fidelity.

As I lived near Putney for a good many years I saw Swinburne frequently. Driving into town about noon I used to look out for him, and met him or passed him hundreds of times till his figure became familiar to me. He was not of imposing appearance; about five feet four, or perhaps five in height, with sloping bottle shoulders, pigeon chest, and disproportionately large hips. There was a certain vigor or perkiness in his walk: his legs at least were strong, and carried the little podgy body briskly. He usually wore a great felt wideawake, which made his head look like a melon, and as he jerked along talking to himself and swinging his arms, with his head thrown back and his unkempt auburn-grey beard floating, one felt inclined to smile. Whenever he saw a pretty child in a perambulator he used to stop and notice it, and nursemaids still tell stories of how he mistook little boys for girls. He was a lover of children and of beauty at all times.

When I began to edit *The Fortnightly Review* I wrote asking Swinburne to contribute, and from time to time he sent me articles and poems, all writ-

ten in a round schoolboy hand, with extraordinary care and clearness. The printers, of course, paid no attention to his reasoned punctuation, and their mistakes used to annoy him excessively; he insisted upon revise after revise—a proceeding I felt to be natural enough in regard to his poetry, but extravagantly meticulous and conceited when his prose alone was concerned. I never could take his prose seriously; somehow or other it always reminded me of the little wooden painted marionettes of a child's Noah's ark. Even when the judgments were wise and shrewd, and whenever lyric poetry was in question, Swinburne's opinions were nearly always finely right and sometimes of surprising divination, yet the wording of them was always antithetical, labored and stilted to a degree. His judgments of prose writers, dramatists, or novelists were as faulty as his prose; he overpraised Scott and Dickens absurdly, ranking them with the greatest, probably because his own faculty of thought was immature. Yet his criticism was invariably interesting; he usually had some reason for the faith that was in him.

For years and years I had no closer relations with Swinburne. About 1897 or 1898, however, some things I had written about Shakespeare interested Swinburne's friend, Mr. Theodore Watts, who came to see me about them, and then asked me to dine, to meet Swinburne. I accepted and went one evening to the Pines. The dinner was very English; I mean

by that there were no modern kickshaws or French sorbets or savories; but very plain, old-fashioned English fare: there were two chickens, I remember, and roast beef and apple pie with custard—enough for a dozen men, and a couple of bottles of sound Burgundy to promote good-will. We all appeared to be blessed with keen appetites, and after dinner settled down to talk.

I don't know why, but the conversation fell on Henley and his enthusiastic praise of *Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers,* which seemed to me boyish, exaggerated. I ventured to remark that I would rather have written *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* than all the rest of Dumas put together were it only for the character of Louise de la Vallière, and I was astonished to find that Swinburne agreed with me enthusiastically, indeed he put la Vallière "among the finest women-portraits in French literature." I could not help saying a word for Manon Lescaut and La Cousine Bette,—and the Master admitted their claims to supremacy with delighted smile and nod.

Emboldened by this accord I ventured to ask whether he really placed Hugo beside Shakespeare, and was dumbfounded to find that he did; he quoted some verses of Hugo—from "La Legende des Siècles," I think; magnificent rhetoric which he gave wonderfully, his whole face lighting up, the auburn mane thrown back, the greenish eyes flaming, the

great dome of the forehead lending weight to the swift sonorous words.

I did not dare to touch on Shakespeare with him: he had evidently been accustomed and encouraged to play pontiff to such an extent that to have differed from him would have been *lèse-majesté* at the least, and, besides, his opinions on the subject were known to me, and I had no desire to shake them.

I preferred to keep the ball rolling while studying his face and manner. When he quoted poetry he mouthed it, as all poets are inclined to do, bringing out the value of the metre at the cost of the sense and magic of expression. Poets are often musicians first and intelligences afterwards.

His pronunciation of French was that of a native, and he seemed to know all French poetry by heart. To something he said I muttered Prudhomme's "Je suis las des mots. . . ." and again he caught fire and went on quoting with intense enjoyment the great verse and hopeless refrain:

Pour ne pas sentir à ma dernière heure
Que le cœur se fend;
Pour ne plus penser, pour que l'homme meure
Comme est nè l'enfant.

Vous qui m'aiderez daus mon agonie,
Ne me dites rien
Faites que j'entends un pen d'harmonie
Et je mourrai bien.

I have never met anyone whose knowledge of Greek, English and French poetry was at all comparable to Swinburne's; as soon as you began to quote any fine passage he would take it up and go on declaiming endlessly.

When he got interested he crossed his legs and uncrossed them, tossing one upon the other rapidly, while his fingers were twitching and his head jerking about, almost like an epileptic. He was evidently intensely excitable; the mind and nerves far stronger than the body—over-engined, so to speak, like Shakespeare. Indeed, in a thousand ways he reminded me of what Shakespeare must have been: the same swiftness of speech and thought, the same nervous excitability, and much the same physique, the little podgy body, the domed forehead, the auburn hair, only the eyes were different—Shakespeare's a light hazel, Swinburne's a greenish-grey. I picture Shakespeare as a little larger and stronger, with a more resolute jaw and chin; handsomer too, if his contemporaries are to be believed, and of far sweeter manners.

I wanted Swinburne to tell me of Rossetti, in whom I have always been intensely interested; but with characteristic courtliness he referred me to Mr. Theodore Watts, who "knew Rossetti most intimately."

I felt impelled to follow his lead, for already several things had become plain to me, the most impor-

tant being that Swinburne in his books had said all he had to say of any moment, and could not be led by me to peer into the unknown or unfamiliar; I was too late; his mind had passed the period of growth and become fossilized. Swinburne was far older at sixty-two or three than Carlyle was at eighty; his intellectual sympathies were cast iron; they could not be widened, whereas Carlyle was as eager to hear and consider new ideas as a boy. When I mentioned Carlyle with praise, the light died out of Swinburne's face; it became lifeless and forbidding; clearly his mind was made up about Carlyle and could not be altered.

Altogether Swinburne seemed to me a creature of extraordinary talent rather than a man of real genius. Take away from him his divine gift of song and he would hardly have become known in literature. There was no elevation in his mind; no humor in his outlook; no width of understanding; no fertility of ideas. He was an astonishing poet, but not by any means an astonishing intelligence; he had five or six main ideas, or rather sympathies, and no wish to enlarge the meagre store. It was evidently Mr. Theodore Watts who inspired the so-called imperialism of his later years. He was a Jingo at sixty, thanks to this intimate friend, or dry nurse as I called him in my thought, just as he was a republican at thirty, thanks to Mazzini and Hugo. He never seemed to have grown mentally after his sev-

enteenth year. It was his want of intelligence which left him stranded at forty-five as the poet of youth. Still, he was always an interesting and attractive personality; he had high courtesies in him and inborn loyalties, and an aristocratic contempt for all conventional lies and false values. He always lived, too, in a nobly serious way for the things of the spirit, the things that have enduring worth and the consecration of the ideal.

The English people should have insisted on burying Swinburne in the Abbey, were it only for his high idealism of character; but English authority was too ignorant, its temper too conventional, and, after all, it is perhaps as well that this flaming eager spirit should not be housed with second-rate politicians and actors. I like to think of Shakespeare in the little church at Stratford and of Swinburne down there at Bonchurch in ground shaken by the swing and thunder of the long rollers. Great men should be alone in death as in life, and no better resting-place could be found for Swinburne than the seashore where he had played as a boy.

Did he not write:

> But when my time shall be,
> Oh, Mother, O my Sea,
> Alive or dead, take me,
> Me, too, my Mother.

TALKS WITH MATTHEW ARNOLD

MANY years ago I gave the following pen portrait of Matthew Arnold, and almost immediately after received a number of letters regretting that I had not written at greater length about him. Some of my correspondents insisted that Arnold was a great English poet, and ought to have had much more said about him, or else nothing at all. Perhaps they were right; at any rate, I am inclined to follow their wishes in the matter and report a few of the many conversations I had with Matthew Arnold in the ten years of our acquaintance. I shall perhaps be forgiven for reproducing here the pen and ink portrait of him to which I allude above. I called him the latest Apostle to the Gentiles.

"A tall man, who, in spite of slight frame and square shoulders, had at least in later life something of the scholar's stoop. A rather long, pale, brooding face, hair parted in the middle over a head a little too flat for thoroughgoing belief; a long, well-shaped nose—a good rudder—a strong, but not bony chin; altogether a well-balanced face, lighted by pale greyish thoughtful eyes. Two side whiskers lent

their possessor the air of a butler of a good house, the shaven lip allowed one to see the sinuous, curving lips of the orator or poet.

"He believed himself to be both a poet and prose-writer of the first rank; his contemporaries took him at his own valuation, for he had the hall-mark of Oxford upon him, and his father was well known; but the present generation is inclined to question his claims. As a prose-writer he preached too much from too narrow a choice of texts, and he was rather a poet of distilled distinction and cultivation than of inspiration or passion.

"By intellect shall no man storm Heaven: the great of heart alone do that, and the passion-driven and the world-weary."

I had met Matthew Arnold here and there a great many times before I got the chance of a good frank talk with him; he was always very courteous, very ingenuous even; he never shut himself up in armored politeness as Browning usually did: he was always charmingly open and frank, like a well-bred schoolboy. Yet somehow or other I had no opportunity of a long talk with him for some years. One day at a luncheon party the whole table began discussing Mr. Rider Haggard's *Jess,* which had just then appeared, and Matthew Arnold was asked to give his opinion of it. The author was present, I remember. Matthew Arnold spoke very warmly of the pleasure the book had given him, and the in-

terest he had taken in it; but confessed at length that he liked the matter-of-fact sister better than he liked Jess. He took, in fact, a quite naïve, almost boyish view of the book. As the party broke up he said he would like to speak with me about something, and we drove together to the Athenæum Club. On the way I asked him how he came to praise *Jess* so warmly. His praise had astonished me I confessed, as the book had no weight or place in letters; all of which to my astonishment he admitted at once with a certain amused carelessness.

"Why then did you praise the book?" I asked.

"I feel," he replied, "that an old fellow should be very sympathetic to the young writers, even if they are not all Thackerays and Fieldings. Can we expect giants always, or should we not rather be thankful for what we get? *Jess* is a good healthy book enough, schoolboyish, as you say; but then we English rather like schoolboy fiction. *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Jones* are both rather boyish, and *David Copperfield,* is that profound?" and he smiled at me deprecatingly.

"Forgive me," I replied, "as you praised the book out of kindness I have nothing to say. But you know the young ones hope always that their seniors will rise to the height of every argument with some great word of exact appreciation. But you wanted to ask me about something, you said?"

"I wanted to ask you," he replied, "about a quite

personal matter. I have been invited to lecture in America. I should very much like to do it; partly perhaps from vanity, chiefly I think because the terms offered me are very good. But I should not like to make a fiasco of it. You know America intimately; I was wondering if you could tell me whether I should be likely to succeed or to fail. Believe me, I am not asking in order to be flattered: I really should like to know before I make up my mind whether to go or stay. Your opinion will have weight with me."

"It is delightfully flattering of you," I replied, "to ask for my opinion. But, as you have asked me, I can only tell you the plain unvarnished truth. There are a few people in every city in America, and even in some towns, who will know you before they see you, who will be able to understand and appreciate the best you can give them; but they are so few, these chosen ones, so few, that they are utterly swamped by the masses of people who will come to see you because they have heard from others that you are a great poet, a great English poet, too, and they will flock to hear you and measure you by their standard, which is not yours at all. They will judge you primarily as an orator or rather as a public speaker. Is your voice resonant and good, your delivery clear and strong? if so they will say you are 'magnetic,' and will be prepared to believe that you are a great man; but if your delivery is halting and

slow and your elocution faulty, they will probably go away to make lewd jests about you; in matters of art they are barbarians."

"Goodness me," he exclaimed, "you frighten me. I have no elocution whatever: I even read my own poetry very badly, I believe. I remember my wife used to say to me, 'I cannot bear to hear you read your verses, Matthew, you do mouth them so.' I am afraid," he went on, laughing heartily at the reminiscence, "I am afraid, you know, that all poets are inclined to lay too much stress upon the metrical quality of their poetry. I have noticed that actors usually slur over the metrical quality and accentuate the sense. Is that what you call good elocution?"

"It is what the average American calls good elocution," I said, "which is more to the point. Personally, I prefer whatever is peculiar, individual, characteristic."

"I see," he said, as if thinking over it, "I see. You don't think then that I should be a success in America?"

"A success with the few, certainly," I replied, "but not with the many, certainly not with the many unless you practise elocution vigorously before starting."

"It frightens me," he said, "it seems a little terrifying."

"But surely," I went on, "you never thought you would be a popular success in America; you would

not be a popular success in London, where the society is aristocratic, where the masses take their tone from the few, where popular opinion is formed from above, like water on sand, which as it sinks spreads over ever-widening strata. Even in our aristocratic society you would be above the heads of all but the best of your audiences. How can you hope to be popular? Your appeal is to the future, and not to the present."

"It is very kind of you to put it in that way," he said, "and perhaps true; still, it disappoints one a little. I am afraid, though, you are right," he added, after a pause, "nevertheless, I think you have decided me to go," and he began to laugh, "perhaps for the sake of that remnant you speak of who will understand and appreciate."

"Oh, yes," I replied warmly, "a remnant that will understand you better, I am inclined to believe, than you are understood even in England. Only they will make no sign: you will hardly know that they are among your audience; but they will be there eager to see and hear the man who wrote 'Thyrsis' and 'The Scholar-Gipsy' and 'Dover' and a dozen other splendid things."

I remember another talk just after he had written a poem on a dog—an exquisite requiem—for *The Fortnightly Review.* I went to ask him to write me an appreciation of Ernest Renan, whom I had

met and had had long talks with in the College de France.

"I see you have divined it," said Matthew Arnold, "divined that Renan was always my teacher; my teacher in the view he took of St. Paul and the Bible generally, though to me he seemed a little superficial in his treatment of Jesus. But a great teacher, nevertheless, a man who appealed to the soul always. He was the first, too, to discover for us the Celtic genius. A great writer!"

I felt inclined to ask him why he had never admitted in print the greatness of his debt to Renan, but thought it more courteous to restrain myself.

On another occasion Arnold showed, I thought, a distinct vein of humor.

"You know," he said, "it is very funny to me—years ago when I wrote prose all the editors whom I knew used to say to me:

" 'Oh, Arnold, why don't you write poetry?'

"And now as soon as I begin writing poetry you say to me:

" 'Oh, Arnold, why don't you write prose?' " and he laughed heartily at the implied criticism.

After his return from America I wrote asking him to write something for me, and then went to see him in order to urge him to contribute.

"Don't ask me!" he cried, "don't ask me. I will not write articles; America has saved me from that; it has given me money and made me independent,

that much I owe it. But you were quite right about the audiences. The remnant is utterly swamped by the vulgar opinion of the mass. What an opinion! What a mass! What a civilization! Almost it makes one despair of humanity. The vulgarity of them doesn't frighten one as much as their intensity —the energy, force, and tumult of them all rushing—whither? It frightens me to think of America."

One can hardly help asking: Was Matthew Arnold a great poet; one of the fixed stars in the literary heaven; will he live there with Browning and Swinburne and Tennyson? He thought he would; declared, indeed, more than once, that his future place was at least as well assured as theirs.

"Tennyson has no ideas," he would say, "Browning's genius is almost hidden by scoriæ; my little things are slight if you will, but surely they are of gold—seven times refined."

Arnold was mistaken in this self-estimate, altogether mistaken, I believe. He was right in many things; his opinions on matters of the day and hour were usually worth hearing; he was an excellent journalist, the best indeed of his time; but hardly more than that; to the last he remained a sort of smaller Renan, Renan at second-hand, a puritanic Renan. He brought no new and fruitful ideas into life; he created no new types; he is scarcely more than a

graceful singer of commonplaces. Sometimes, when looking at him, I thought he was a Jew; there was surely Hebrew blood in his veins; at any rate, his deepest words are about religion and the life of the spirit:

> The sea of faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear,
> And naked shingles of the world.

He had no inkling that the tide of faith was already on the turn and would soon be again at flood.

Matthew Arnold as Critic

Since writing of Arnold's poetry and person I have found myself plagued by his critical prose work, and must at all costs try to rid my soul of the unholy obsession. I think I may dismiss his critical writings on religion and on politics without more ado. His views on religion were taken from Renan and "Bayswatered" down to suit English taste with cheap English puritanic prejudices altogether unworthy of a master. His views on politics were even more superficial and vain, though he said things about

the middle and lower classes in England which are as witty as they are true. But his best things in this field were all borrowed from Heine and he took care not to sponsor any significant part of Heine's tremendous indictment of the British oligarchy and British laws. One doubts whether he was capable even of appreciating its power and pertinence.

Inasmuch as Arnold was first and last a man of letters, one is surely doing him no disservice by treating his literary judgments alone.

It is curious to notice that even his conceit has some relation to his power as the shadow has some resemblance to the figure. He thought far too highly of his own academic poetry; but, after all, he only compared himself with his contemporaries; he overestimated his critical faculty extravagantly, but he was careful to avoid the supreme tests. We must not look to him for any revision of the secular judgments of Homer or Dante or Shakespeare. He will quote isolated lines of Homer and Dante and extol their beauty; but the passages he selects are usually bethumbed passages, or moral aphorisms seldom startling or significant, and when he laments "the imperfections of Shakespeare" in comparison with "the perfection of Homer," we are fain to forgive the absurdity, though it was a characteristic aberration of the schoolmaster. As a rule he approaches the gods on his knees with becoming reverence.

With the same instinctive shrinking he avoids the

highest function of criticism in his own time; no new star ever swims into his ken; he does not affect the rapture of discovery. He would never praise Victor Hugo as Swinburne dared to praise him: so far as I know he never even discusses Balzac or Blake, and when he talks of Milton or Goethe he only ventures a cursive commentary on Scherer's well-known judgments.

But about the writers of the second or third magnitude he has much to say, and what he has to say he says on the whole excellently well, so well indeed, with such measure, such lightness of touch and humorous felicity, that one loves to listen to him and applaud him. It seems unkind to find fault with so agreeable a guide, who has been at such pains to cultivate amiable manners. But, after all, as Matthew Arnold himself knew, "the disinterested reader will have truth," and one ought not to be "satisfied with fine writing about the object of one's study"; it is indeed our "business to learn the real truth about the important men and things and books which interest the human mind." What, then, is the truth about Matthew Arnold and his critical faculty?

Let us try to take a test case that shall be favorable to him, the case of some poet who has been misrated and misunderstood; let us not take Verlaine, whom he never seems to have noticed, nor Heine, where his cruel misjudging may be attributed

in part at least to his insufficient knowledge of German; but let us take Keats, Keats who was of the preceding generation, Keats who died at twenty-six, whom he should, therefore, one would think, have been able to see fairly and to classify with precision. The task was not difficult. Browning finds a magical word with which to praise him—"Keats, him even!": Tennyson, whose want of intelligence Arnold deplored, declared that Keats lived "in the very heart of poetry"; what will Matthew Arnold say of Keats?

He starts well by accepting Milton's famous saying that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, impassioned." None of us can wish a better judgment on Keats than must result from such a measure. But to our astonishment after borrowing a fine criterion, Matthew Arnold goes on at once to take exception to Keats's "sensuousness": was he "anything more than sensuous"? he asks. Keats's poetry does not furnish him with any example of excessive sensuousness, and therefore he takes the *Letters to Fanny Brawne,* though Keats is assuredly to be judged by his poetry and by his poetry alone, and not by love-letters thrown off in the heat of passionate youthful ardor. It would be as unfair to judge Keats by these letters as to judge Goethe by his letters written to Frau von Stein. But let us follow our guide. He declares that he sees "no reason whatever" for the publication of these letters: "they ought never to

have been published": a fortiori, therefore, they should not be discussed by a critic who takes his work seriously. But that would not suit your Puritan: Arnold has discovered, he thinks, a dish that is rather "high"; he cannot resist the temptation to taste it, to roll it on his tongue, to savor it to the full before rejecting it, and thus at one and the same moment enjoy the sin and the condemnation of it. No more perfect example of hypocrisy could be desired!

But, after all, what has Matthew Arnold found? Here are the worst passages he can discover in Keats's letters:

> You have absorbed me. . . . I have no limit now to my love. . . . I have been astonished that men should die martyrs for religion—I have shuddered at it. I shudder no more. I could be martyred for my Religion—Love is my religion. . . . I cannot breathe without you.

Now what on earth is there to take exception to in this? There is nothing here which hasn't been said by Shakespeare and Dante and Goethe; much more sensuous stuff was written in the Song of Solomon, consecrated by the admiration of a hundred generations; a still more sensual because solely physical, appeal was made by Chaucer, whom Matthew Arnold praises for "health and sanity."

But Chaucer lived a long time ago, and is therefore sacred, while Keats is almost of his own time,

so Matthew Arnold whips him with the sad inferiority of his tepid temperament. Here we have "the merely sensuous man," he cries, "the man who is 'passion's slave.'" He uses the Shakespearean phrase without any inkling of the fact that Shakespeare has given a thousand proofs that he was more enslaved by passion than ever Keats was. Matthew Arnold, then, allows himself to talk of this letter as "the love-letter of a surgeon's apprentice." . . . "It has in its relaxed self-abandonment," he writes, "something underbred and ignoble, as of a youth ill-brought up!" No wonder Heine wanted to leave England in order to get quit of its "gentlemen, and live with unpretentious fools and rogues."

This snobbish and vicious nonsense does not stand alone in Matthew Arnold's work, or I should have striven for pity's sake to forget it. Puritan prejudice and English propriety debase and degrade all Arnold's critical work. He regrets the publication of Dowden's *Life of Shelley:* he does not "want the truth about Shelley's passion," though he assures us again and again that "truth, the real truth," is what "the disinterested reader" demands.

Even this disgraceful priggish "underbred" and "ill-brought up" has its parallel elsewhere. Matthew Arnold writes from Paris that he has come across a new poet, one Heine, who "apes the bitter scepticism and world-weariness of Byron," but then Byron is an English lord, and has the right,

Matthew thinks, to feel disgust with ordinary life —"Byron had the *entrée* everywhere." And so we find mixed with Puritan prejudice and English hypocrisy the essential oil, so to speak, of British snobbery. Nurtured in early Victorian gentility, Matthew Arnold does not like the word "snob." Scherer gives instances of Goethe's extraordinary "snobbishness" (it is the very perfume of Germanic vulgarity!), but Matthew Arnold will not have the word: he calls it *"caporalism,"* striving fatuously to disguise the rank odor with a ridiculous neologism.

Matthew Arnold could never have been a great critic, but he might surely have reached somewhat the same level as Swinburne had not English Puritanism debased his judgment and destroyed his intellectual honesty.

He condemns Faust as a "seduction drama," though he praises Sophocles without measure in spite of the Greek's parricides and incest. He takes poor Burns as mentor, and asserts that passion "petrifies the feeling," though he himself has written:

> **Ere the parting kiss be dry**
> **Quick, thy tablets, Memory!**

He cannot even select the great lines in Dante, the "simple, sensuous, impassioned" lines, but praises beyond measure such a copy-book headline as

In la tua voluntade è nostra pace.

He is curiously typical of the English middle-class in his hatred of simple, sensuous, impassioned poetry such as Heine's and his ready acceptance of the rhymed rhetoric and coarse animalism of Byron. But, after all, he is best seen in his treatment of Keats and Milton. He condemns Macaulay's Essay on Milton not alone for "redundance of youthful enthusiasm," as Mr. Trevelyan condemns it; but because "the writer has not for his aim to see and to utter the real truth about his object." He finds his master, Scherer, declaring with much justice that "The Paradise Lost" is "a sort of 'tertiary' formation, the copy of a copy, wholly factitious . . . a false poem, a grotesque poem, a tiresome poem . . . but immortal . . . it will be read for incomparable lines."

Matthew Arnold knows that the true judgment on Milton is even severer than Scherer's: he knows that it is English Puritanism which ruined Milton's poetry; he even says so once—"they (the Puritans) spoiled him," but he shuts his eyes to the truth. He is resolved to praise Milton, and he praises him for "elevation of style," and is not ashamed to say that his elevation of style is due to "a moral quality in him—his pureness." There we have it: the English Puritan is to be tickled at any cost, even of truth. For whence comes the "elevation" of Shakespeare or the elevation of Sophocles or the

elevation of Goethe or of Ecclesiastes or of the Psalms? Certainly not from "pureness."

Had it not been for his debasing Puritanism Matthew Arnold must have told the truth that Keats, though handicapped by poverty, illness, and untimely death, stands higher as a poet than Milton, that he has shown a nobler spirit, and has left a richer legacy mainly because he was not degraded by Puritan falsehoods and by the childish Puritan misconceptions both of God and man.

Poor Matthew Arnold, how heavily handicapped he was by birth, how ill-brought up! The son of a schoolmaster-cleric of the strictest sect of British Pharisee! True, he had an extraordinary endowment; he was gifted with a French mind, French lucidity of vision, French amiability and urbanity, and, above all, with something of a Frenchman's high conscience in all intellectual and artistic matters, but, alas, the Bad Fairy condemned the charming little fellow to be born in an English upper-middle-class home, and so he was trained painfully to be a sort of pinchbeck Wordsworth.

It needs, as Arnold himself once said, "a miracle of genius" like Shakespeare to grow comparatively straight and high in such an atmosphere.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT[1]

MY memory almost invariably connects persons by likeness or by contrast—for example, I think of Emerson and Nietzsche together as opposites, while Maupassant and Kipling resemble each other, though the talent of the one is peculiarly French and the talent of the other peculiarly English. Both are born story-tellers of the first class, though characteristically enough the domain of the Frenchman is love, whereas the domain of the Englishman is war. Both have written masterpieces. *La Maison Tellier* and *L'Heritage* are even finer than *The Man Who Would be King* or *The Drums of the Fore and Aft.* Both men came to immediate popularity, which means that both were on the ordinary level of thought and feeling, and wrote for ordinary men and women. The man in the street in Paris and in London finds himself in Maupassant and in Kipling; he has the same outlook, the same vague creed, the same hopes and fears, the same simple imperative instinct to achieve his own well-being and that of his country. Both men might

[1] *Souvenirs sur Guy de Maupassant* (1883-1893). By François, his Valet de Chambre. (Plon-Nourrit and Co., Paris.)

have been born three hundred years ago, for neither has had anything to do with the thought-currents peculiar to our time. There is, too, a curious physical resemblance: de Maupassant, like Kipling, was short and broad and strong, and so ordinary-looking that it is difficult to make the reader see him by means of words. He was a Norman by descent, lumpy-shouldered, large-limbed; the oval of the face rather long; features regular; hair dark brown and thick; eyes greyish-blue. He would have passed unnoticed, save that he was handsome, in any European crowd. If you studied his looks you could see no trace of exceptional endowment, save perhaps something searching in the regard, a certain sensitiveness in the well-cut lips and in the refinement of small hands. De Maupassant, like Kipling, was healthy, courteous, well-mannered; both were made social lions; but de Maupassant allowed himself to be swept away by the current, whereas Kipling in this respect seems stronger. Both men got the best out of themselves; but Kipling had the longer wind, though the Frenchman plunged deeper into life. De Maupassant, like Kipling, met you fairly, and, while conscious of his achievements, was well aware, too, of some, at any rate, of his limitations—in fine, two ordinary healthy men, rather under than over middle height, gifted with an extraordinary writer's talent. Both men, like Franz Hals, depicted the life which they saw and lived

with marvellous verisimilitude, making of ordinary men unforgettable portraits—portraits that live in the memory like photographs transmuted into pictures by an incomparable brio of presentment.

This book of de Maupassant's valet ought to have been a masterpiece, for it deals with the last ten years of the great writer's brief life; it covers all his best work and the appalling tragedy which brought his life and labor to an untimely and horrible end. The valet François witnessed the tragedy; lived through it, indeed, from the first scene to the last; but he saw it and understood it without realizing its universal significance or putting it before us so that we too must realize it and the lesson of it. His book, therefore, is not an unique book—hardly, indeed, a valuable book. There is no proportion in it, no sense at all of the relative importance of events. Hundreds of pages are filled with trivialities: the furnishing of rooms, journeyings in France, Algeria, and Tunis, yachting excursions, dinners, feeble practical jokes and ordinary distractions, which are interrupted by alarming hints of recurring illness always connected in some mysterious way with the visits of a "dame à la robe gris perle"; then suddenly comes the confession of de Maupassant himself, who tells of unstrung, discordant nerves—and "malaise indicible." There follows a casual description of the slow partial recovery; then another visit of the lady whom Fran-

çois now calls the "Vampire," and a day or two later de Maupassant worn to a rag, cuts his throat in a frenzy, and ends his life in a madhouse—"Encore un homme au rancart," as he cried himself in characteristic bitter modern phrase; or as one might English it—"Another carcass for the dust-heap."

Here is tragedy enough to fill a volume with wonder and regret and pity; the poor gifted, passionate, foolish, human being in the toils of necessity, a slave of his own passion, which to him is inexorable fate:

> Who shall contend with his lords,
> Or cross them or do them wrong?
> Who shall bind them as with cords?
> Who shall tame them as with song?
> For the hands of their kingdom are strong.

In truth "the hands of their kingdom are strong." But there is hardly more than a hint of the astounding and awful tragedy in this book, hardly more than a suggestion anywhere of de Maupassant's trial as with fire and his utter incredible breakdown. François appears never to have seen much more than the outside of his master, and that, as I have said, was commonplace enough; but de Maupassant's temperament was abnormal and deserves a careful and sympathetic study.

In order to give my readers an adequate comprehension of de Maupassant's passionate endowment, or the strength of his temptation, or the horror of

the tragedy, I should have to use plain words, and that is impossible in any English book. The tragedy is there, and the lesson flamed out in letters of fire; but the purblind British Puritans have unanimously decided that the ostrich policy is the most becoming and fitting policy for English writers, and we poor scribes are forced to bow to their infallible dictation. "Little Mary" we may write about, it appears, and "our obligations to our betters," and "our duties in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call us"; but the great human problems are not to be discussed by us; truth holds no sanctuary for us, but for the free peoples and their teachers, for the Sudermanns and Brieux and Artzibacheffs and d'Annunzios, but not for the Grundy-ridden descendants of Shakespeare and Bacon.

But to return to my text. If François the valet has shown himself unable to depict his brilliant master, if he has not attempted to rise to the height of the great argument and justify the ways of God to men, he has incidentally painted himself as the very model of a wise and kindly valet, as a very honest, humble, reverent, human soul, and has besides reproduced de Maupassant's daily life for us, and given us little sketches of de Maupassant's mother and some of his friends which are immediately recognizable. This leads me to fear that because I knew de Maupassant intimately I am inclined to be

a little unjust to this book, which does after all perhaps in a degree make up for the want of personal knowledge, and does supply some of those little personal peculiarities which bring the man before us in his habit as he lived. Moreover, there are in this book a few pages of high interest in which de Maupassant reveals himself, or at least his mind, to us at its best. I make no apology for transcribing those which I regard as worthful and characteristic.

I was introduced to de Maupassant by Blanche Macchetta, an exceedingly fair American with magnificent red hair, who figures in the first pages of this book as "the author of several novels" and "as intelligent as she was beautiful." We dined together, and de Maupassant took away my breath by declaring that he hated writing and only whipped himself to the work by thoughts of the money he would make and the pleasant yachting trips which the money would buy for him: Pegasus only valuable as a grocer's nag. To François he confesses that this is not the whole truth, not even the best part of the truth. "There are in France some fifty thousand young men of good birth and fairly well off," he says, "who are encouraged to live a life of complete idleness. They must either cease to exist or must come to see that there can be no happiness, no health even, without regular daily labor of some sort. . . . The need of work is in me," he con-

cludes. "As soon as I have finished all the novels and short stories I have in my head I shall write a sort of general analysis of my works, and then I'll review all the great writers whom I think I have understood. That would be an easy piece of work for me and of great interest to younger writers. Besides, it would delight me to reread again all the masters who have afforded me intellectual enjoyment."

As everyone knows, he admired Flaubert more than any modern writer; he used to speak of him as his spiritual father, and insisted that after France had passed through a dozen revolutions and had forgotten all the other writers of the time, Flaubert would be studied as a classic, as one "who had lent French prose divine grace and harmony."

De Maupassant's praise of other writers was often astonishingly generous. Already, in '88, he talked of Bourget as a master, and of Zola as "a great writer . . . a considerable literary value," though he could not help adding, with characteristic frankness, "personally, I don't like the man." He did not like his work either; indeed Zola's method of work was the absolute antithesis to his own, and if we consider the two ways we shall find that de Maupassant's method was right, and Zola's wrong. Here is the comparison as recorded by François. First of all, de Maupassant admits that "Zola is a relentless workman, willing to undergo any labor.

He's now thinking of writing a novel on every different class of laborer. But a man of real talent oughtn't to do that sort of thing. He should only write what he has felt, what he has seen and understood. I'd go even further and say he should only write of what he loves and of what he hates, of what he has lived, suffered and enjoyed. I'm not tempted to imitate Zola." It was well for him that he saw so truly, felt so justly. There are books of Zola which are mere rubbish-heaps of industry, whereas every volume of de Maupassant is worth reading.

De Maupassant sometimes forgot his own precepts. His little story, "Les Deux Amis," made a painful impression on me. It tells of how two middle-aged bourgeois in Paris during the siege of '71 went out on a fishing expedition in the Seine heedless of the fact that they were beyond their own lines. They were seized by a small German detachment; the officer tried to wring a valuable secret from them and when they refused to betray their compatriots they were put against a wall and summarily shot as spies. And, with the two bodies there before him, the German officer tells his servant to take the catch of fish and cook it for his *déjeuner*. It is a brutal touch; the pathos of the story being due to the fact that the two Frenchmen are quite helpless and harmless. De Maupassant, I found, had no facts to go on for this malevolent fiction; a sorry performance, just

as base in its way as Kipling's similar attack on the Russians for having tortured and flogged a British officer who had fallen into their hands. Both men seemingly delighted to spread hate by senseless slander.

Before leaving this book I must give some idea of de Maupassant's religious beliefs, for, after all, it is from what a man believes about this life and the life beyond the grave that we get his truest measure. He did not talk freely on such matters, even to his intimates. The death of his brother, however, and a visit to his tomb, stirred him to speech, and the account of these hesitating and partial confessions are the most interesting pages in the book. De Maupassant was particularly self-centred and inaccessible to strangers; but his family affections and his rare friendships were intensely passionate and tender. His mother was an ideal to him, and he mourned his brother as one who would not be comforted. "I saw him die," he says. "According to the doctors, he should have died the day before; but he was waiting for me and would not go without seeing me once more and saying 'good-bye' to me again. 'Adieu . . . Au revoir peut-être? . . . Qui sait?' "

And then this word about Jesus. Pointing to the great figure of the Christ outside the cemetery, de Maupassant said:

"Surely the finest intelligence and the most perfect nature ever seen on earth when one thinks of

all He did! And He was only thirty-three when they crucified Him! . . . Napoleon I, whom I admire, though only for his genius, said of Him: 'In all that that Man did—God or not—there is something mysterious, incomprehensible. . . .'"

Yesterday I went out to "Les Ravenelles," his mother's villa in Nice. It is set on a little height behind the Rue de France, and here de Maupassant spent that 1st of January, 1892, his last day on earth as a man among men. The "Vampire" in grey silk had just paid him another visit and had left him drained of strength and hope, exhausted, enerved, panting. In spite of his indescribable wretchedness and misery, that "malaise indicible," he would not alarm his mother by his absence on such a day; but dragged himself over from Cannes, and gave her whom he loved so tenderly the illusion at least that he was getting better. The effort cost him more than life. He returned to Cannes by train, and at two the next morning François heard him ringing and hurried to his bedside, only to find him streaming in blood and out of his mind, crying—*Au rancart! au rancart!*

Today I went through the little, low, two-storied villa, and sat where he had sat, and walked where he had walked. Here, on this raised, half-moon terrace, on that bright, clear day, with the sunshine sparkling over there on the red roofs and the blue sea he had always taken such pleasure in; here he

stood, another Antony, and fought a more terrible fight than the Roman ever imagined. I had seen him a month before, and had had a long, intimate talk with him which cannot be set down in these pages; but it enables me to picture him as he was on that fatal morning. He had taken François with him to cook his food; he meant to give himself every chance of winning in the fight, and now, the meal over, the strain of talking and pretending grew intolerable, and he came out here by himself, with only the blue, unheeding sky above and the purple, dancing sea in front to mock his agony.

How desperately he struggled for control; now answering some casual remark of his friends, now breaking out into cold sweat of dread as he felt the rudder slipping from his hand; called back to sanity again by some laughing remark, or some blessed sound of ordinary life, and then, again, swept off his feet by the icy flood of sliding memory and dreadful thronging imaginings, with the awful knowledge behind knocking at his consciousness that he was already mad, mad—never to be sane again, mad—that the awful despairing effort to hold on to the slippery rock and not to slide down into the deptns was all in vain, that he was slipping, slipping in spite of himself, in spite of bleeding fingers, falling—falling. . . .

Hell has no such horror! There in that torture chamber—did his agony last but a minute—he paid

all debts, poor, hounded, hunted creature with wild beseeching eyes, choking in the grip of the foulest spectre that besets humanity. . . . And all for what? For another mad hour with the "bourgeoise de plus grand chic . . . d'une beauté remarquable," all for another kiss from the stylish lady of really remarkable beauty, "to whom he was always glad to say 'good-bye.' "

The worship of the great goddess Aselgeia is sweet indeed, honey to the lips; but the price she exacts from her devotees is appalling. How many of them I have known, and how brilliant they were: her victims are taken from the most gifted of the sons of men. Heine fell to her and Maupassant and scores of others whom for pity's sake one does not name—young and gifted and lovable. As the clown says in *Twelfth Night:*

> Pleasure will be paid some time or other.

TALKS WITH PAUL VERLAINE

NOWHERE is the growth of mankind so clearly to be seen as in their ideals. Before beginning one of his famous portraits, Plutarch tells his readers that on this occasion he is not going to talk to them of some famous general or statesman who should excite emulation in well-born youths; but of a painter whose example no gentleman would think of following, a mere artist. Nearly twenty centuries later Bacon puts forth much the same view: in classifying men he gives the first five or six ranks to statesmen, and artists are not even mentioned as among the great. But today we should put saints and prophets and artists high above generals and statesmen; indeed we esteem artistic power as the highest and rarest of human endowments and say that a general can only be great in so far as he wins his battles like an artist, that no saint can hold us, no prophet inspire, unless he, too, is gifted with the artist-faculty. And of all artists the greatest is he who works in words.

Goethe says somewhere that Tacitus and his history are as valuable as Rome, that all England and English worth found expression in

Shakespeare, in fact that the dream of life itself is not so memorable as the telling. The workman and the merchant, the lawyer and doctor, the man of science, the soldier and the priest all live and labor as material for the Singer. Nothing endures like the word: "it liveth and it conquereth for evermore."

It is not wonderful then that men should be curious about the poets and artists of their own time. They will take more and more interest in them, and not less, as they advance in wisdom. I need no excuse, therefore, for talking here of Verlaine, for he, too, was one of "the Sacred Band."

Paul Verlaine did not look like one's ideal of a poet: he is best to be seen in Rothenstein's pencil sketch; his likeness to Socrates was extraordinary. One could have sworn that the old Silenus-mask was come to life again in him. But Verlaine had not the figure of the great fighter: though of average height he was punily made and inclined to be podgy. With his careless, slovenly dress he would have passed unremarked in any street crowd, French or English. He seemed, indeed, to wish to avoid notice: there was something timid and shy, a shrinking even, in his manner, due to constitutional nervousness rather than to reserve. With friends Verlaine gave himself as freely and simply in talk as he did in his writings. I have never known any human being with such childlike, perfect frankness,

such transparent sincerity in thought and being. After a couple of hours spent with him I found myself wondering whether everyone by mere frankness could be so charming. Of course it was the absence of malice in Verlaine, the absence of all spite, envy and hatred, the lovingkindness of the man which was so engaging, and a touch of gay ironic humor lent an ineffable fascination to his childlike good nature.

The first evening he dined with me he told me of an adventure which seems to me characteristic. After he came out of prison in Belgium he made his way to England. In London poverty forced him to offer himself as a teacher of French.

"I was engaged," he said, "almost immediately by a clergyman at Bournemouse at seventy pounds a year, *sans blanchissage*. 'No washing' was wonderful to me," he added, "because I use so little" —and he smiled.

"Ze train was arranged for me and everything, and I was met at ze station by a big man, a clergyman.

" 'Are you Mr. Verlaine?' he asked.

"I say 'Yes,' and he shake me by the hand, and talk to me the most terrible French I have ever heard. His accent was more than an accent; it was a new language. One had to guess at his meaning. I had to tell him I could understand him better if he would talk English, though I only knew half a

dozen words. He took me to his house, which was the school, and treated me splendidly. He showed me ze room that was to be mine, and asked me to dinner. His wife was charming to me, and they both told me they were sure I should succeed. I could only say, 'I will do my best.'

"After dinner ze clergyman told me he thought it better I should rest ze next day, and get to know ze place and school and everything. He was kind to me and thoughtful. There were colored texts in my room, very beautiful texts, and time-tables—the time to post letters, time to get up, time to go to bed—and there was a Bible on my *table de nuit;* the clergyman was very English. I told him I was willing to begin work at once, but he would not hear of it, so I rested the whole day. Next morning he came into my room to introduce me to the boys.

" 'Your first class will be a drawing class,' he said.

" 'Drawing!' I cried. 'I know nozzing of drawing.'

" 'Every Frenchman,' he said, 'can draw.'

" 'But I cannot draw,' I exclaimed in an agony, 'not at all; I have never held a pencil in my life. I came to teach French; I really know French.'

" 'Yes,' he say to me, smiling and putting his hand on my shoulder, 'but you do not know much English yet, and until you do know a little more English I think I had better go on teaching French!'

" 'Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,' I said to myself, but I could not find words to answer him. He took me into the class and put a wooden cone on the table and told the boys to draw it. I was to correct zere drawings.

"What I teach the boys I do not know. I taught myself more than I ever taught myself in my life. In a fever I studied light and shade for an hour. Of course I was a little better than the boys; but I was no more master of drawing than he was master of French. Oh, his French, it was horrible! He talked out ze verbs in a loud voice, and ze class had to repeat zem after him, and no Frenchman could have understood what he was saying. Such a language I never heard in my life. He was very English, but he was kind to me always. I had to go out long walks with the boys. Some of the older boys were interesting and ze country about Bournemouse was beautiful. That English life was new to me. It was strange and it absorbed me: it healed me. It was like an oasis in the burning desert of my life. I got quite well in Bournemouse, but why was it—seventy pounds a year, *sans blanchissage?*" and he murmured to himself, shrugging his shoulders, "*sans blanchissage, et je m'en sers de si peu!*" Again and again—"Seventy pounds a year, *sans blanchissage.*"

"I am glad you liked English life," I said to him, "and Bournemouth."

"It was healthy," he replied, "and ze clergyman he meant well with his texts and time-tables; and I learned a good deal of English, and read some Shakespeare. *Quel divine poète!* I could never understand how that clergyman and Shakespeare could be of the same race."

I was eager to find out how much Verlaine knew of Shakespeare; whether he had divined him at all. But when I pressed him he took refuge in generalities; and when I tried to get to my end by comparisons he would not be netted. He likened Shakespeare to Racine for beauty of phrase; and when I tried to say that there was no magic in Racine, no word or thought comparable to Shakespeare's best, he accepted what I said with smiling good humor. His acquiescence was evidently of politeness and not agreement.

It was difficult to get at the soul of the man, difficult to reconcile this charming faun-like creature with the hero of a strange and tragic story. Yet I felt that the two were identical; behind Verlaine's openness and sincerity were deeps on deeps of feeling. Every one who has read his early lyrics must have heard of the tragedy, of his passionate admiration for the youth Arthur Rimbaud and the terrible outcome of it. It may all be told here very briefly. Verlaine left his wife and child and went to Brussels with Rimbaud. After living together some time they quarrelled, and Verlaine followed

his friend one night to a brothel and in a fit of mad-jealousy shot him. While Rimbaud lay wounded in hospital, Verlaine was sentenced to a year's imprisonment. It was in prison that the poet first came to repentance and the humility of the Christian faith, and thus reached the apparent disharmony of his dual existence. For all through his life afterwards he floated from passion to repentance, from the lust of the flesh to sorrow for sin in perpetual alternation. And his poetry falls naturally into one or other of these categories. Never was there such a sinner and such sincerity of sorrow.

But few know more than the bare outline of the tragic story, though Madame Verlaine is still alive, and her account of what happened forty years ago is easily obtained. She is, I believe, about to publish her "Memoirs" and to relate in detail her relations with "Verlaine," as she always calls her husband. Meanwhile it is of interest to psychologists just to consider what she has to tell of that almost accidental meeting with Rimbaud which had such a profound effect on Verlaine's life. Madame Verlaine is now a comfortable-looking old lady, who has long lost the "thin arms" the poet sung, though "the merry eyes" of her youth are still to be divined. She is anything but diffident, and talks of her past life with complete frankness and a curious detachment.

"We had just returned from the country," she began, "we had been staying at my husband's place

at Fampoux. We called at Lemerre's (the publisher's). Verlaine was given a letter with some verses signed Rimbaud. 'They're very good!' he said, and showed them to my mother, to Charles Cros, and to Banville. 'Astoundingly good,' they all agreed. 'You must ask the poet to come to see you.' And on the spot they subscribed to pay the expense of the journey. At that time we were living with my father and mother in a little hotel in the Rue Nicolet. In the linen-room there was a little iron camp-bed, which my brother Charles de Sivry used to put at the disposal sometimes of any student friend who might be hard up. We decided to let Rimbaud have it. . . . Verlaine went to meet him at the station; while he was absent Rimbaud arrived: a great mane of untidy hair, fat cheeks, skin tanned by the sun, fine eyes though, and short trousers: he seemed shy and sulky. He must have been about my own age," Madame Verlaine went on meditatively, "about seventeen. Verlaine returned: we all began to talk. . . . From that moment Verlaine altered to me. He went back to the life of the Café and the morning drink, and used often to come home in a bad temper. . . . I was very young and in my innocence put Verlaine's liking for Rimbaud down to the beautiful things Rimbaud wrote; for every one admired him, but all the same I said to myself that his influence on Verlaine was a bad one. . . . Then my son Georges was born, and

he made up to me for the constant scenes. . . . One morning I awoke with dreadful neuralgia. Verlaine went out as he said to fetch Dr. Cros. At noon he had not come back. Night came and no Verlaine. For four whole days my father searched Paris for him: he had gone away with Rimbaud and had taken all his money with him (I had only a small income). . . .

"At first I was completely overwhelmed. Then my courage returned: I wouldn't give my husband up without a struggle. I managed to find his address. I wrote to him in Brussels; finally he consented to see me. Off I went with my mother, leaving my child in Paris. I met Verlaine in the morning in a little hotel, I think it was called *L'Hôtel Liégois*. I begged him to return with me. He refused. I proposed that we should travel: he refused. A new idea came to me. What if we went to New Caledonia, he had friends there, Louise Michel and others: we should see new countries? The idea appealed to him. He said he'd meet me that afternoon and tell me. . . . At five o'clock that evening we met in the public garden near the station. He seemed sulky, as he often was after drinking coffee. 'Well?' I asked.

"He replied casually that he'd go with me.

"All trembling with joy I crossed the square to my mother: 'He accepts.'

" 'What?' she cried.

" 'Don't let us waste time talking,' I said, 'let's start.'

"We all went to the station and got into the train for Paris. After it started we ate some cold chicken. Verlaine didn't speak a word: he pulled his hat down over his eyes and went to sleep. We reached the frontier, and had to get down for the Customs. Afterwards we went to the train. But Verlaine wasn't with us. We hunted everywhere for him high and low—in vain. The train was starting: the porters pushed us in: I was almost out of my mind. Suddenly, there before me on the platform was Verlaine. 'Jump in, jump in,' cried my mother to him. 'Come,' I cried, 'the train's starting.' 'I'm not going,' he replied, and he pulled his soft felt hat down over his eyes resolutely. I never saw him afterwards. . . .

"At first I was dreadfully unhappy. Verlaine talks in a poem of my voice as 'weak,' that of a consumptive. It was true: regret made me ill. For five years I was as near death as could be. It was only the thought of my son that gave me the strength to struggle. Once the child got measles and was very ill. I'll never forget my anxiety: I was desperate.

"Well, just then Verlaine wanted to see him. My mother consented, hoping to bring about a reconciliation. I had no hope, hardly the wish, indeed; Verlaine was so weak, so changeable. I stayed in the next room and would not see him. I did right: he

never came back again. . . . Oh, he wrote me—interminable letters, innumerable! For three years I kept them without opening one. I remember getting one letter from him in which he said:

"'If you're not back with me by noon I'll kill myself.'

"I only read it three years later. . . . I suppose he loved me still, or thought he did. He was kind; but so weak, so unstable, untrustworthy—like water, terrible! I wanted to forget him, I succeeded at length, I had to."

How natural the scenes, how lifelike the actors! Can one ever forget Verlaine on the platform, moody, pulling his hat down over his eyes, "I'm not going."

And then the child-wife frantic with anxiety about her boy; but resolved not to see the father, and waiting in the next room till he should go: he had hurt her too deeply: "I wanted to forget him, I had to . . ." What a picture of life etched in by suffering!

I was in constant relations with Verlaine, both as editor and friend, for the last few years of his life. I published some poems of his in *The Fortnightly Review,* though I had a good deal of difficulty with my directors in getting adequate payment for poetry, and French poetry was anathema to them. When I sent Verlaine his cheque he used to reply in a letter

thanking me, and at the end of a month or so he would write me another letter saying he hoped I liked his poem, and would I send the money for it to the above address. Of course I wrote to him saying I had already sent the money and held his receipt for it. He wrote back admitting the fact and excusing himself, saying he was so hard up that he liked to think he had not been paid. Of course I did what others would have done, and sent him more than I owed. There was something of the wisdom of the serpent mingled with his childlike frankness.

In those latter days Verlaine was to be seen at his best in a restaurant on the *Boul' Mich',* where he often spent his evenings. He used to sit in a corner drinking and talking of poetry and literature with a little crowd of fervent admirers about him. Every student who came in made a point of passing his corner and of bowing to him in greeting with a *"cher maître."*

Verlaine accepted the homage with a child's unfeigned delight. It was to him a sort of apotheosis, the reward of much suffering. One night some one begged him to recite "Le pauvre Gaspard," a most characteristic poem, as characteristic perhaps of Verlaine as "The Last Word" is of Matthew Arnold. The poem was suggested, I imagine, by a word of Alfred de Musset—"Je suis venu trop tard dans un monde trop vieux?" But the question is brought

to intenser significance by Verlaine. The last verse runs:

> Suis-je né trop tôt ou trop tard?
> Qu'est-ce que je fais en ce monde!
> Oh, vous tous, ma peine est profonde:
> Priez pour le pauvre Gaspard.

He recited the verses perfectly, bringing out all the pathos of them, while marking the rhythm with a slight beat of his left hand. A silence as of unshed tears followed, and in the silence he repeated the last verse again, as if to himself, slowly, sadly, and then suddenly his mood changed and in the last line he substituted *"payez"* for *"priez,"* smiling at us the while mischievously. Of course we were all too eager to pay for this poor Gaspard.

I have left myself practically no space to speak of Verlaine's achievement as a poet, but there is less need for that, as his work is known and loved wherever French is read. There is no more beautiful poetry in the language. Verlaine's name will be coupled with Villon's in the future as a writer of the best French lyrics. His religious poems deserve perhaps a higher place. He is the greatest Christian singer since Dante and his passionate sincerity of feeling brought new effects into French poetry. There is a singular directness and simplicity in his best verse which is very rare, and he uses a childlike repetition, common enough in Eng-

lish and German poetry, but almost unknown till his time in French poetry, with extraordinary impressiveness:

> Vous connaissez tout cela, tout cela,
> Et que je suis plus pauvre que personne,
> Vous connaissez tout cela, tout cela,
> Mais ce que j'ai, mon Dieu, je vous le donne.

FABRE

IS there any pleasure after forty like finding a new book, meeting a new man! The gasp of excitement, the hope, the flutterings of delight, the growing conviction that the book has widened the mental horizon, is a classic therefore, a possession of the spirit for ever—all the joys soon merged in curiosity as to the writer: who is he? How did life treat him? To what qualities in him do we owe this deathless work?

There before me is the book *Insect Life,* the author's name, before unknown, now radiant—J. H. Fabre. Where does Browning talk of the delight of seeing and naming a star? No shadow of doubt in the recognition, no hesitation possible. Fabre has revealed a new world to us; beneath our very feet indeed—the world of the infinitely little, with its innumerable tiny inhabitants, each living his own life and dying his own death. The comedies and tragedies of their existence are shown us with simple, scrupulous care, and we realize at once that this world, too, is all fashioned like our own with purposes we cannot fathom, to ends inconceivable—all mysterious, indeed, and wonderful

to us; now innocently beautiful as a June morning, now grotesque and petty, now sublime, now horrible: self-abnegation and love working through blood and lust to some unknown goal or—to no goal at all; for the darkness is impenetrable: the doubt will not be laid.

The shallow, modern optimist is brought to shame at once. Fabre, it appears, is already a very old man—eighty-seven indeed; has worked as a naturalist in a village in Languedoc for three-quarters of a century; has written and published thirty volumes, and was only discovered by the wise men in Paris the other day, when, as he says himself a little sadly, "I'm past work."

Yet there can be no question about his value. Maeterlinck calls Fabre "one of the glories of the civilized world . . . one of the most profound admirations of my life." Rostand talks of him as a savant who "thinks like a philosopher and writes like a poet," and Richepin joins in the chorus. For the first time in my memory Frenchmen of all schools are agreed that Fabre is one of the great naturalists of the world, and yet if he had died at eighty-five hardly one man in ten thousand of his own countrymen would have known his name. So much for popular appreciation of genius in a democracy.

Yet his life has been as noble as his work. The son of a poor peasant, he taught himself to read

by the light of a pine-cone—a tallow candle being too dear. After hours of study on winter nights he used to lie with the sheep in order to get warm, and was often awakened by the howling around the fold of the savage wolves of the Rouergue. He paid his way through the College at Rodez by his services as a choir-boy, and then set himself to study Nature on an empty stomach, but with a new book of poetry in his pocket. Poverty has been his companion throughout his life: even now the house he lives in with his wife and children is a peasant's cottage distempered rose-red with jalousies painted pea-green, and his food and clothing are simple in the extreme. Yet he looks on life bravely, fairly, without affectation of triumph, or trace of bitterness: "It's wretched luck," he says, "that now I've got some good ideas I'm unable to carry them out. . . . I can only think when I'm walking about, and," he adds with regret, "my legs have given out."

I don't know how to begin telling all that Fabre has done in his seventy-five years of labor; the result is colossal. Ten volumes on insects and their lives and instincts, and ten or twelve other volumes with a practical lesson in each of them. One on the domestic animals, one on the animals useful to agriculture, another on insects hurtful to agriculture, another on botany, yet another on "The Earth" and a companion volume on "The Heavens." There are besides lectures on zoology,

lectures on history and agricultural chemistry, chapters on coins and poetry—five thousand pages, in which one finds everywhere the patient, loving observations of the naturalist arranged by a most sincere artist and set to words by a poet. Fabre, it seems to me, has written the first book of the new Bible, the Bible of Nature.

Let us take him as our guide in this new world for a little while. He begins by talking about the sacred beetle of the Egyptians, the common beetle of the South of France, which every one has seen on the road pushing an enormous ball ten times as big as himself up hill and down dale with feverish energy and indefatigable perseverance. Scarcely one observer in a hundred cares to notice that the booty is made up of cowdung or other excrement, that the beetle is one of the most assiduous of Nature's scavengers. Again and again the sturdy little creature in its gleaming black armor pushes the ball up some steep hill; half-way up a blade of grass tree-like bars the way and suddenly ball and Sisyphus-workman roll to the bottom over and over again in hideous defeat. The beetle returns to his task undismayed, and after inconceivable efforts gets the ball where he wants it.

Often he has to fight as well as labor. Another beetle will come down and perch on top of the ball and annex it, and strike down the true proprietor as soon as he advances to the attack. The beetle's

courage is beyond question; he attacks again and again until he drives away the robber or until he is convinced that the robber is the stronger, in which case he hurries back to the dung-heap and begins to form another ball, which he will again push to its destination.

Worse even than the robber is to be met with in the beetle's struggle for life. Sometimes another beetle quietly joins the proprietor and at first makes some show of aiding him by pulling the ball while the proprietor pushes it. After a little while, however, the parasite usually tires of the work and calmly climbs on top of the ball, and allows the indefatigable proprietor to push him as well as his dinner to the common refectory.

When the beetle has got the ball where he wants it, in some sunny, quiet corner, he immediately begins to dig out a cave twenty times as large as himself, and ten times as deep. As soon as he is lost to view the parasite seizes the opportunity and begins pushing the ball away for himself. But the proprietor, down in his cave, returns every now and then to the surface, and as soon as he misses the ball hurries after it and the parasite. Sometimes the parasite will coolly pretend the ball is his, but, as a rule, he does not want to fight, and therefore becomes very officious indeed in pushing the ball back to the refectory. When the proprietor has carefully lowered the ball into the cave the two con-

struct a roof, and thus shut themselves out from the world in a warm, half-dark cave. In solemn silence and shade they begin the most extraordinary banquet that has yet been recorded in the world. For twenty or thirty days they will sit opposite each other eating without intermission or pause day and night till the last atom has been consumed, leaving as proof of their powers a long thread of excrement which runs into yards each day, and each day weighs as much as the feasters. And this Gargantuan banquet for private pleasure, subserves the public health, for the excrement of the sheep and cow is thus cleared away and prevented from infecting the upper air.

But feeding is only one small part of the activity of the beetle. Fabre looks not upon hunger, nor upon love, but on maternity as the sovereign inspirer of instinct. A male beetle will make a great booty and eat it, but when the female wishes to lay her eggs the two make a ball many times larger composed of finest nutriment for the benefit of the larva. They pick out a sunny bank and dig a large subterranean chamber in which the immense ball of food is gradually formed into the shape of a pear, and pressed and patted and beaten till the outside of it is as smooth as silk. This outside plays the part of a shell, and is soon hardened by the heat of the summer sun to the firmness of terra-cotta. This shell, so to speak, is intended to keep

the inside soft and eatable for several weeks in spite of the heat.

The female lays her eggs in the small end of the pear, and round it she puts the finer milky nourishment of her own body for the little worm to eat as soon as it is born. With infinite care she closes the aperture over the egg so that a certain amount of air can penetrate to the larva, and then she and her mate leave their work and go in search of food. If the beetle is a glutton when it eats, it labors magnificently, and when constructing the nest for its young often goes without food for weeks at a time; in fact it is an ebony jar of energy which it dispenses for its offspring.

And the little worm when it wakes to life and looks about it for nourishment shows just as wonderful instinct. If you pierce his birthchamber with a needle and let the air in while trying to study him, he will at once close it up with excrement, and repeat the experiment as often as you please.

But how, it may be asked, does the little larva manage to get out of his terra-cotta prison? He has to reckon, it appears, on chance for salvation. The first rainy day will make his prison soft and spongy, and he can cut his way out into the light. If no rain falls he dies. The first day of his deliverance he takes a sun bath. He will crawl up a blade of grass and sit sunning himself all day

long without an attempt to find food, the next day his appetite awakens, and his normal life begins.

Fabre describes other nests as complicated as the nest of this beetle is simple; nests that are found five feet and six feet under ground; nests with long corridors and galleries where not one pear is prepared for the offspring, but half a dozen; and where the heat of the sun is tempered for the little naked worm.

The maternal instinct, with its self-sacrifice and foresight and care, is often wise with the wisdom of a fiend, and cruel to a degree almost unknown among beings of a larger growth. The hardest problem for the mother is to ensure good food for her offspring—food that will remain soft and eatable and, if possible, fresh for weeks. Certain species have hit upon a remarkable way of solving the difficulty. Fabre found in their nests what at first seemed to him the carcasses of other beetles. Then he was struck by the fact that these carcasses had not gone bad. Studying the bodies, he discovered that the beetles were still alive, and they lived on under glass in his room for as much as a month or five weeks. Yet they could not move, and could do nothing to defend themselves—could indeed be eaten while alive by the tiny, soft larva. They had been paralysed, in fact—but how?

First of all he noticed that nearly all of them belonged to one species, and then he discovered

that this species had the ganglia of motor-nerves concentrated just between the corselet over the chest and the corselet over the stomach. Here, then, was the vulnerable point. An experiment or two showed him that if he pricked them in this spot with a needle having a drop of ammonia on it he could paralyse the motor centres—in fact he could make the beetle as helpless as he had found it in the nest. The next thing was to find out whether this was the way their enemies proceeded.

In a chapter called "A Clever Butcher" he tells us the story: he watched the insects at work. The insect he calls the Cerceris is the butcher. The Cerceris seizes the larger beetle by the head and pushes him backwards till the corselet protecting the chest and the corselet protecting the stomach are separated; he then darts his sting into the ganglia between the two armors. Immediately the beetle falls as if struck by lightning. Its legs may move spasmodically for a second or two, but that's all. Its assailant stands watching its victim in its agony. When the Cerceris sees that the beetle is quiet he drags it off by the leg to lay up in warm storage for weeks and weeks, to be eaten bit by bit, while still alive by the little larva. No more horrible cruelty can be imagined. Tennyson was right when he talked of Nature lending evil dreams. But what cleverness in the Cerceris! Who taught the little beast the vulnerable point? If chance discovered

the weak spot it needed reasoning power to act on the discovery and turn hazard into instinct. But Fabre will provide us with instances of still more intelligent cleverness and still more fiendish cruelty.

I have never heard or read of any fights so desperate, so diabolically clever and cruel, as those Fabre describes between insects. Dozens of different species paralyse their victims by stinging them in the nerve-centres. Not one bungles the operation or stings at random; knowledge directs the weapon—one might almost say scientific knowledge. As Fabre says, chance knows no rule.

Many of these combats rather resemble a fight between a pirate and a merchant-ship—the difference in size is more than made up by the difference in armament. The pirate is sure to win. But Fabre tells also of death-struggles where every conceivable advantage is with the big fellow, and yet the daring little assailant brings off the victory. For example, every one knows the terrible spider of the South—the spider with the black belly, the Tarantula—whose poisonous bite kills a mole or a small bird, and often makes even a man seriously ill. Well, there is a waspish creature called the Calicurgue Annelé, or Pompile, not half the size of the Tarantula, and with a sting not a tithe as venomous, who does not hesitate to attack the great spider. On dissecting the Tarantula, Fabre found that the thorax was the place in which a sting would

paralyse its motor-nerves. He then brought the two enemies face to face. The disproportion in size, strength, and armor seemed enormous; yet the Pompile was not frightened. He walked round the spider and halted, as if to seize it by a limb. At once the great Tarantula rose on its hind legs and opened its mouth: Fabre saw the poison glistening on its dagger fangs. The Pompile walked away, but was not frightened. It was the Tarantula that showed fear and hate; he hurried after the Pompile and seized him; put his poison-fangs on him, but did not bite; why not? Fabre could not imagine. But the fact remains. One day, however, the Pompile assaulted the Tarantula face to face and stung him—in the thorax? No, he knew a trick worth two of that, a trick which the human anatomist had overlooked.

If he paralysed the motor-nerves the Tarantula might still bite him. With the utmost precision and care the Pompile stabbed the great spider in the mouth, thus rendering him incapable of using his fangs, and then, after examining his head to make sure it was powerless, he darted his sting into the thorax again and again, so that his young might not be incommoded by the spider's movements. The little insect is as clever as a surgeon practised in dissection.

There is still another insect that attacks and conquers in the same way; but as soon as it has

brought off the stab in the mouth it executes a triumphal, ferocious war dance round its victim. "Look at the great brute," it seems to say. "I've pricked him and made him harmless; I am a champion at the game." Then having made sure that its victim is indeed powerless to strike, it proceeds scientifically to paralyse one motor-centre after the other, and sometimes there are a dozen that must be operated upon before the victim is entirely helpless.

The love-making of many insects is just as interesting as their mortal combats. Fabre has a chapter on the pairing of the Scorpions of Languedoc, which is more fascinating than most of our novels.

He begins by describing the creature. It is some three inches long, and straw-colored. Its tail, which it generally carries arched over its back, is in reality the stomach, and the last joint of it contains the poisonous sting. The poison itself looks like a drop of water, and no chemical analysis of it has yet been successful, for when the ingredients revealed by the analysis are again combined, the poison has lost its power. The sting itself is very strong and sharp, curved like the striking tooth of a snake, and, like the snake's poison-fang, the hole from which the poison issues is a little away from the end. The animal uses its front claws or pincers as a weapon or as a means of getting information.

Fabre keeps his scorpions in a glass cage, and

studies them at leisure. For the most part of the year they are quiet and solitary; two are never seen together. But in April they begin to move about and get lively. He suddenly becomes aware that they are eating one another; here is a pair, and half of one is already consumed. Is it the result of a combat? A little later he finds another, and yet another instance of cannibalism. As the summer advances the fact becomes common. He begins to study it. He notices at once that the one eaten is always middle-sized and a little paler in color than the cannibal. In other words, it is the large brown female which eats the male. It is always the male which is eaten. Fabre pursues his investigation by night with a lantern. To his astonishment he finds a sort of ball going on. These creatures, which used to be so solitary and so shy now come out of the shade and hurry together in crowds under the light as to a dance. Their agility makes the onlooker smile. Clearly they are sorting themselves out in pairs. Here the male touches a female with the end of his claw, but immediately springs back again as if he had been burnt. Another pair join hands, but as soon as their tails meet and touch they move away from each other as if in disgust. At times there is a regular tumult; a whole crowd of claws and pincers and tails rubbing and touching and pinching, one scarcely knows whether in anger or in love. The play is madder than a romp of kit-

tens. They all fly apart; then they begin to come together again. Suddenly Fabre notices a pair which take hands in a friendly way, and rub tails with manifest content. Side by side, claw in claw, they walk away together. They are evidently courting like a village boy and girl. Every now and then the male caresses the back of his companion with his tail. The female accepts his caress.

To his amazement, they stop and kiss. There can be no doubt about it. Fabre has watched it again and again. The two faces—or what should be faces—come together and the two mouths meet. The two hands are clasped, too, the male sometimes lets loose one pair of pincers in order to pass his claw tenderly over the horny head of his companion. Clearly the pair are kissing; yet there is no face there, nothing but two eyes and a great cavity and a jaw, and still the two horrible masks evidently enjoy the embrace. Now and then the male pretends to bite her, and his mouth mumbles her mouth, while his front claws are caressing the horrible mask that is no doubt lovely in his sight. There is a French proverb which says the dove invented the kiss, but the scorpion, Fabre says, was before the dove.

There is every trick of coquetry in this female. Suddenly she has had enough, and strikes the male's wrists away, and pretends to go off by herself. The male follows her, takes her claws in one of his,

and caresses her back with his tail. Again they resume their walk together. A piece of tile is in their way. At once the male works with his tail and one claw in order to make a cave underneath the tile. He tries to draw the female in; but she resists; she will not enter the newly made bridal-chamber. With sulky determination she draws the male from underneath the tile, and they continue their walk. For hours the courtship goes on. Again the male finds a sheltered nook; this time under a slate. Again the female resists; but this time the male is more determined, and draws her resolutely toward the cave in spite of her resistance. But when she comes to the edge of the slate she finds support. Not only does she root her claws in the ground, but curls her tail over so that it stems itself against the slate; she then stiffens into rigidity. The struggle continues minute after minute, but at length the male has to give in; the pressure is relaxed and the walk resumed, with its caressings and hideous kissings.

This courtship has all sorts of incidents. Every now and then the pair meet some other females, who always stop and watch the couple, perhaps out of jealousy, for now and then one throws herself on the female and holds her claws and does her best to stop the walk. The male protests against the interference. He pulls and drags at his companion in vain; he cannot budge the two females;

again and again he strains to the task, but without success. Suddenly he gives up the courtship and turns away. Another female is close by; he seizes her by the claws and invites her to continue the promenade, but she will not; she resists, struggles with him, and then scuttles away. Nothing daunted, he goes to a third in the crowd of female onlookers, and this time is more fortunate, the female accepts his claw and they go off together. With this lady the courtship is not so long. At the first piece of tile the male drops one claw of his companion and uses his free claw and his tail to hollow out a cave. Little by little he enters, drawing the complacent female with him. Soon they have both disappeared. A movement or two of the tail on the inside and a little mound of sand is pushed up behind them; the door is shut, the couple are at home.

Again and again Fabre lifts the tile, but discovers nothing: the claws are intertwined, the mouths touching, but as soon as the light falls on them the lovers separate; yet in the morning, if he leaves them undisturbed, he always finds the tragedy completed, the male has fulfilled the purpose of his brief life and is already partially devoured by the female. She goes to work quite calmly to eat him, and returns again and again to the loathsome feast until her lover is all consumed except the hardest parts of his claws and tail. All the coquetry, all

the love-making, all the caressing and kissing ends in the murder of the lover and the disgusting feast on his remains.

As if to complete the horrible parody of human life, these cannibal scorpions make noble, self-sacrificing mothers. They take infinite care of their little ones, spending weeks on their nurture and training, weeks in which the mother does not even eat, so devoted is she to her young.

Scorpions are supposed to be viviparous, but Fabre proves that their young come into the world in a sort of soft egg like a snake's egg, and have to be freed and cleansed by the mother.

He tells, too, how the scorpion family is brought into the world in July, and how nearly he missed the experience because some great naturalist had said the time was September. For years, he declares, he has read very little. He prefers the book of Nature which is open before him and which does not lie. Most of the printed books, he says, even those of the masters, are so full of errors that he prefers to see and record facts for himself.

I should like to tell of Fabre's other activities and wider views. There is an interview with Pasteur as a young man which is a masterpiece of kindly observation and sunny humor. Fabre's poetry, too, should be described; for he has a genuine poetic gift, childishly simple yet touching, with a rare feeling both for the color of words and their rhythm.

I like to picture him as he sits before his cottage; the spare, bent figure; the wide, soft hat, the soft, white, turned-down collar setting off the clean-shaven face—a finely balanced face which should have been drawn by Holbein, with its broad forehead, strong nose, and large, firm chin, for Holbein alone could give us the effect of the crow's-feet and the intent, piercing eyes, made small as if to shutter out the too strong light, the sharp eyes which are yet patient and at bottom sad, very, very sad.

For this is the soul of the great searcher after truth: he will see all there is to be seen and brings to the task infinite courage and patience; but "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" is to him the sorrowful conclusion of the whole matter:

"I should like to believe in progress," he says, "in the gradual growth of intelligence from plane to plane, the progress upwards and development; I should like to believe in it if I could; but I can't. . . .

"I find God in my own heart more clearly than anywhere in the outside world. . . .

"The world I have studied is a tiny world, and yet this little patch of life is an infinite ocean, still unsounded and full of undiscovered secrets. The light penetrates a little way below the surface; but lower down all is darkness and silence, abyss opening into abyss. . . .

"Success in this world is to the noisy and combative, to those who talk about themselves in and out of season like

cheap jacks at a fair: they become known because they make a fuss."

"But have you reached no conclusion, M. Fabre?" one asks. "Does no hypothesis lead to the heart of the mystery?"

He shakes his head. "I have found none. To science nature is an enigma without a solution. Every generation has its own pet hypothesis. We climb over the crumbling ruins of forgotten theories, but truth always escapes us. We have no net with which to capture truth. . . .

"Are we not even a mystery to each other? Nay, is not each man a mystery to himself? a creature of infinite possibilities, of miserable imperfect achievement?"

So talks a very wise man and certainly one of the best-read in the book of Nature of whom the centuries have left us any record.

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

THERE is nothing very new to be said of Maurice Maeterlinck's work. While still a young man he had won place as an European celebrity. Plays like the *Princesse Maleine* and *Pelléas et Mélisande* were known at once and appreciated by the dozen or so lettered readers who are to be found in every capital. And the judgment of these refined jurors is very like the judgment of posterity in sympathetic comprehension.

In spite of these early successes Maeterlinck has gone on working, and in *La Vie des Abeilles* and *Le Trésor des Humbles,* in *Monna Vanna,* and *La Magdalena* he has given record of the various stages of his soul's growth. Since the death of Tolstoy he has become one of the most interesting figures in modern Europe, and certainly the most popular. Yet when one surveys the whole of his work one is tempted to doubt whether he will excite as much interest twenty years hence. His most characteristic and perhaps his best works so far are *La Vie des Abeilles, Le Trésor des Humbles,* and the play *La Magdalena.* Is there in them that

fount of new truth or rare beauty which ensures perdurable renown?

The boundaries of art are continually being extended and new fields added to her glorious domain: Rousseau and Byron made descriptions of natural beauty a part of literature, and in our time the rights of citizenship, so to speak, have been conferred on the so-called lower animals. Fabre in France and, in lesser degree, Kipling in England have dramatized for us the stories of speechless suffering and inarticulate delight.

This growth of sympathy and appreciation has its own peculiar charm, which is heightened by the novelty of the appeal: but I do not feel sure that the work done in these outlying new fields is as valuable and enduring as work done at the centre. The one subject for the artist which can never grow old, or fall out of fashion or lose its pristine and permanent interest for us all, is man. Whatever has to do with humanity is of palmary importance: the heart does not alter or change: it is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Paint a picture of a girl's love more passionate than the Antigone, call her Francesca and set her supernal radiance in the gloom of the Inferno, or christen her Gretchen and condemn her to madness and prison, still the picture will delight every one, age after age, and confer immortality on its author. Would one say as much of a scene which describes

the loves or fears or hatreds of one of the lower animals? I do not think so.

There are superb qualities in the *Life of the Bees* by Maeterlinck; chapters in which he shows himself a great naturalist; others, like *Le Vol Nuptial,* in which he unfolds all his poetic gift; but one never thinks of rereading the book, and as soon as it is read it begins to fade out of memory. It is a charming and informative book which we are delighted to have read; but there is nothing of permanent interest in it, no pages to which we can return again and again with thrilling delight as we return to the loves of Francesca and of Gretchen.

Le Trésor des Humbles gives us the measure of the writer. In his earliest dramas, in *La Princesse Maleine,* as in *Pelléas et Mélisande,* Maeterlinck won our hearts by a certain mysticism, a northern atmosphere, so to speak, of mist which lent a vague symbolism and spirituality to his personages while clothing his immaterial imaginings with the majesty of purple shadows.

In these days of logical and clear materialism when even a poet like Matthew Arnold could write "miracles do not happen," though it would be far truer and more scientifically exact to say that whatever happens, is one long miracle, Maeterlinck's early dramas came with something of the force of a revelation. Somehow or other he had

managed to drape his slight and insubstantial figures with the magic of the Beyond, the wonder of the Unknown, and all hearts beat high with the hope that at length a Prophet-seer had come who might give us an adequate interpretation of the Divine, a new reading of the myriad new and uncoordinated facts of our unintelligible life.

La Vie des Abeilles brought us from the tiptoe of expectance to a more reasonable attitude, and *Monna Vanna* and the translation of *Macbeth* keyed our hope still lower; but at length in *Le Trésor des Humbles* Maeterlinck returned to his early inspiration, and in a series of essays gave a reasoned explanation of the faith that is in him. His first essay consisted of an elaboration of what Carlyle and Emerson have said about "Silence," with a slight though characteristic addition: "Without silence," Maeterlinck says, "love itself would have neither savor nor perfume of eternity. We have all known those sacred moments when lips separate and souls draw together without words: we should seek them ceaselessly. (*Il faut les rechercher sans cesse.*) There is no silence so docile as this silence of love, and in truth it is the only silence which belongs to us mortals. The other great silences of death and dolor and destiny are not under our control."

The greater part of this *Treasury of the Humble* is made up of essays on some of the great mys-

tics, on Ruysbroeck, on Novalis, on Emerson. I should like to be able to say that Maeterlinck had added something to this great Temple of the Spirit; but I have not found a single addition, nor even an explanation of any obscure statement. Maeterlinck is content simply to restate this or that thought which has pleased him and so to furnish himself with a suit of clothes, so to speak, pieced together from various royal wardrobes. It is true he does realize that the soul has a speech of its own; but he calls its speech silence; whereas silence is only a condition, and not even a necessary condition, of its audibility. I prefer Swinburne's word:

> Eyesight and speech he wrought
> As veils of the soul therein——

But just because Maeterlinck feels these elemental truths his language now and then assumes a peculiar pathos and wins a new spiritual significance. He tells us that "the souls of all our brethren are perpetually following us about mutely imploring from us some sign of recognition, some kiss of sympathy. But most of us never dare to reply to the beseeching invocation. It is the misfortune of our existence that we thus live separated from our souls and fearful or ashamed of their tremulous noble desires." But how different this tentative statement is from the language of the true seers, how different

and how inferior; how pale and weak and hesitating. Maeterlinck is certain that "the writings of the mystics contain some of the purest and most brilliant gems in the treasure-house of humanity," but he has not added to the store: he is a Moses, so to speak, to whom it has not been given to enter the Promised Land. He can only survey it from afar, and his account of it is of hearsay and not of direct vision; it is that of a stranger, and not that of one of God's spies.

But perhaps in suggesting this qualification we are asking too much of the artist: it is certain that Maeterlinck is at his best when creating and not criticizing or reporting. His play of the *Magdalene* touches a higher note than he has reached in any essay. The story as he tells it is of the simplest. The "Magdalene" is pursued by a Roman general, who proposes to her the usual bargain of the French stage: "If you will give yourself to me," he says roundly, "your prophet, Jesus, shall be set at liberty." The woman hesitates for a while; but at length tells her importunate suitor that what he suggests is out of the question. "It is the Prophet himself," she declares, "who has made all such bargains for ever impossible and shameful." By virtue of this one beautiful word, the "Magdalene" of Maeterlinck lifts us to reconciliation and a serener air.

With the exception of recent photographs, the best likeness of Maeterlinck, I think, is that carica-

ture by Max Beerbohm which appeared some years ago, if I am not mistaken, in *Vanity Fair*. Every one knows the presentment of the big stout man in Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers and gaiters, with a lighted cigar in his hand and an air of infantile astonishment on the chubby face with the embryonic moustache and bulging forehead. There is something ineffective, childlike, yet lumbering, in the expression, and a something truculent as well, and this truculence is rendered subtly enough by the left hand thrust deep in the pocket of the knickers, and by the heavy thumb which holds aloft the lighted cigar.

Maeterlinck's writings do not prepare one for fumbling ineffectiveness, and still less for truculence: the tone of them is uniformly persuasive, ingratiating, poetic, so much so indeed that when you meet the man you are apt to be a little surprised by his self-assured manner, which is prone to become a trifle aggressive as of one not sure of his high place. I shall now tell of my meetings with Maeterlinck and try to render the impression his personality made upon me.

Maeterlinck is easily described: a broad Fleming of about five feet nine in height, inclined to be stout; silver hair lends distinction to the large round head and boyish fresh complexion; blue-grey eyes, now thoughtful, now merry, and an unaffected off-hand manner. The features are not cut, left rather "in the rough," as sculptors say, even the heavy jaw and

chin are drowned in fat; the forehead bulges and the eyes lose color in the light and seem hard; still, an interesting and attractive personality.

Maeterlinck's qualities show themselves quickly. He is very ingenuous and sincere not to say simple, and quite content to dismiss this subject or that with the ordinary ready-made conclusion:

"All translations are bad, and resemble the original as monkeys resemble men. When you translate Bernard Shaw into French he loses all spice; when I see something of mine in English I hardly recognize it. You think my translation of *Macbeth* poor," he went on; "I only did it because that of François Victor Hugo seemed to me wretched; but then, you know, no Frenchman can understand Shakespeare, just as no Englishman understands Racine."

I ventured to remark that worse had been said about Racine by French judges than by English: Joubert, for instance, dismissed him contemptuously as "the Virgil of vulgar people"; but Maeterlinck would not have it: "A great poet . . . exquisite verses . . . unforgettable melodies." Such complacent platitudes did away with even the wish to argue.

In the first half-hour's talk I noticed two peculiarly French traits in Maeterlinck which both have their root, I imagine, in a certain uneasy vanity. He loves to pick holes in his most famous contem-

poraries and to make fun of their weak points. We were talking of the success of his wife (Georgette Leblanc) in Ibsen's *Masterbuilder:* some one happened to remark that it was a great play.

"A great playwright, I should prefer to say," corrected Maeterlinck, "on the strength of a single fine play, *Ghosts*. *The Masterbuilder* seemed to me a little ridiculous; that 'higher,' 'higher,' is really irresistibly comic. During the rehearsals we all held our sides, aching with laughter; but it went all right, I confess."

"Yes; it went all right," and the grotesque element in it was only visible to envious eyes. But Maeterlinck loves to *blaguer,* though he ought to know that the gods veil themselves from the profane and are not to be seen by those who would hold them up to ridicule.

The second characteristic which Maeterlinck shares with most Frenchmen, and, indeed, with nearly all the Latins, is a habit more easily forgiven. We were all talking of boxing; the French champion, Carpentier, had just beaten the English middle-weight champion, Sullivan, in a fight at Monte Carlo, and beaten him with the utmost ease. To my astonishment Maeterlinck proclaimed himself a devotee of the art—"a splendid exercise," he said, "which I practise three or four times a week." And incited, perhaps, by a desire to rebuke my incredulity, he announced his intention, after lunch, of

going "to box hard for an hour or so." The idea of a stout man of fifty, after a copious lunch, going out to box struck me as somewhat ludicrous, though I should not like to say it was impossible if the professional antagonist were well "tipped" and gifted with a sense of humor.

When not engaged in keeping up his reputation for strength of body and biting wit, Maeterlinck was very interesting. When one asked him which of his works he liked the best, he replied that he never looked at any of them after publication. "Only a dog goes back to his vomit," he said. "Once the thing is done, it has no further interest for me."

The question, "What are you working at now?" brought the answer that at fifty it was very hard to begin any "really important work. Though I feel as well as ever I did," he went on, "I know that in the nature of things I cannot expect a much longer lease of health: the blow may fall at any time, or may be delayed for ten years; but it is pretty sure to fall soon, and why should one begin to build a ship which may never reach the sea?"

"Cervantes," I replied, "did his best work after sixty, and some of Goethe's finest lyrics were written when he was over seventy; why should you wish to close the book at fifty?"

"Those were giants," he interjected, "and exceptions. Besides, I have no wish whatever to close the

book: I love life, and I go on working steadily: I only say that I'd find it very difficult now to begin any important book. I mean by that," he added hastily, "a book which would need a considerable time to complete."

"As a matter of fact," he went on, "I am even now working at a sort of faery tale, trying to express the inexpressible, to realize the immaterial and give form to pure fantasy, and so suggest at least meanings beyond the reach of words."

The Maeterlinck who spoke in that way is the same man who wrote in youth the early mystical dramas, and in maturity *Le Trésor des Humbles* and *La Magdalena,* the man who, in spite of many weaknesses, has always at command the seduction of the poet and a breath, at least of the prophet's inspiration.

And how infinitely sincerer this simple confession of his purpose is than the habit practised by most English writers of depreciating their art, and the ardor with which they give themselves to its service.

We have only to compare this confession of Maeterlinck with a characteristic utterance of one of the standard-bearers of the preceding generation to realize at once the distance we have travelled in the last twenty years. In an interesting article on *La Voyante* and Lourdes, which appeared in 1896, Zola suddenly exclaimed impatiently:

"Ah! cette soif de l'Au-delà, ce besoin du divin." (Ah, this thirst for the Beyond, this need of the divine.)

But instead of studying this extraordinary phenomenon; instead of asking himself whether this need in human nature, this perpetual desire for the divine is not as essential as the need of food (for man does not live by bread alone) the great realist concluded simply that the hope was a mirage, the thirst imaginary, the longing a delusion.

And now towards the end of his life Maurice Maeterlinck is tormented by the obsession just to give artistic form to this obscure and persistent desire which is stronger than the reason and more enduring, the thirst for something beyond ourselves and above—the sons of men dimly realising at length that they are in very sooth, the sons, too, of God.

RODIN

A BOOK has just been published about Rodin and his work by a M. Gsell. It is an admirable piece of work, and shows us the very soul of the great sculptor in spite of the fact that Rodin is not very articulate, words not being his medium. M. Gsell has drawn him out and interpreted him with singular sympathy and understanding. As I have known Rodin for twenty-five years, and regard him as one in the line of great French sculptors—a worthy successor to Houdon and Rude and Barye—and certainly the greatest of living sculptors, I shall use M. Gsell's book as a sort of outline sketch for my portrait of the master.

Rodin is to me the creature of his works: the bodily presentment even is a true symbol of his soul: a French peasant in figure—a short, broad man with heavy shoulders, thick thighs, and great, powerful hands. There is realistic likeness in Tweed's bust. The neck is short and thick, the nose large and fleshy, the forehead high but retreating, the eyes grey, by turns reflective and observant. There is an air of transparent sincerity about the sturdy little man, with his careless grey beard and

AUGUSTE RODIN
FROM A LITHOGRAPH BY WILL ROTHENSTEIN

worn clothes. Always I see the large, strong hands, the short neck and lumpy shoulders—a master craftsman with a tremendous sensual endowment.

The first chapters of this book are weak, but when Rodin talks of "the science of modelling" he begins to hold us. He learnt it when a young man, it appears, from a fellow-workman who taught him to model the human figure as if the surface were pushed out from the inside. There is no flat part of a body; it is all hills and valleys: this to him is the secret of modelling, and he declares that this was the practice of the Greeks, the only method which makes every statue a picture in black and white. No etching, he asserts, has such a boldness of light or such a velvety depth of shadow, as a well-modelled statue: "By such modelling the masterpieces of sculpture take on the radiant aspect of living flesh."

The fourth chapter is still more interesting, because it brings out a modern phase of the eternal conflict in art between what is beautiful and what is true. Gsell asks him about his "L'Homme qui Marche." Rodin begins by declaring that he wanted to render life, and life is movement. "I have hardly ever," he adds, "represented complete repose. . . . Fine modelling and movement are the two master qualities of good sculpture." But the moment the pair begin to study Rodin's "L'Homme qui Marche" they both notice that the movement is

not true, that the man has both feet on the ground at the same time, whereas in walking one foot is always just leaving the ground as the other reaches it. A better illustration still occurs to Rodin. He takes the picture of Géricault in the Louvre, the famous "Racing at Epsom." Géricault represents the horses galloping, according to the French expression, *ventre à terre*—the front legs outstretched in front and the hind legs outstretched behind. Now instantaneous photography teaches us that this is not in accordance with fact. Before the front legs touch the ground the hind legs have already been drawn up in preparation for the next spring; so that if you picture a galloping horse properly you picture it with all four legs bunched together, the hind ones unnaturally drawn up underneath the stomach, almost overtaking the front ones, which are just leaving the ground. In fact, the animal seems to be caught in the act of jumping with its legs all hobbled together. Rodin immediately puts the matter properly: our eyes do not give us the truth of things. When we see a man walking we see both his feet on the ground; when we see a horse galloping we first see his fore legs thrown out in front and then his hind legs stretched out behind; and thus we represent him to ourselves. The expression *ventre à terre* is true to our vision though false to fact. And the apparent truth is all that matters to the artist.

The two collaborators discuss other interesting problems. Rodin insists that both painting and sculpture can represent action to a much greater extent than is commonly supposed, and he takes for example his own figures the "Bourgeois of Calais" and the masterpiece of Watteau, "L'Embarquement pour Cythère." His criticism of Watteau's masterpiece is an exercise in eulogistic analysis. The painter begins, he says, on the right, by showing a lover kneeling to his mistress and trying to persuade her to accompany him. A little more towards the centre another gallant is helping his mistress to her feet, as if they were just about to start; and so on. Below these figures on the knoll, and nearer the water's edge, a crowd of people are going towards the boat, the women as eager as the men. Rodin has nothing but praise for this conception, declares that the picture is a masterpiece—*"un ravissement qu'on ne peut oublier."*

This praise is fairly deserved if we look only at the painting or even at the drawing of the various figures and groups; but, architecturally considered, "L'Embarquement pour Cythère" is anything but a wonder-work. The whole movement takes place from right to left of the picture, whereas it should proceed from left to right. It is probably our habit of writing and reading which makes it much easier for us to follow motion from left to right than from right to left. I have always felt a certain incon-

venience in regarding this masterpiece of Watteau. The action of the picture should have begun on the left, and the eye would then have passed naturally towards the right from group to group instead of unnaturally and with a certain effort as it does now.

I find a similar want of thought in the much-bepraised French coinage of today: the medal of the woman sowing is effective and well modelled; but the artist presents her with her hair flowing out straight behind as if she were sowing against a gale —a feat always avoided in actual life.

In the fifth chapter Rodin's gift as a draughtsman is discussed. It is not sufficiently known that Rodin makes hundreds of sketches both with pencil and with wash of color. Some of these drawings are among his boldest and most characteristic work. "Ordinary people don't understand them," he says; "but ordinary people can never know anything about Art. . . . In all crafts truth and simplicity are the master qualities." And then he goes deeper: "Color and drawing—style at its best—is nothing but a means to display the soul of the artist. It is the soul one ought to try to know; artists should be classed according to the soul."

The seventh chapter is taken up with a superb criticism of the great French sculptor Houdon, to whom we owe a number of busts of celebrated men, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Franklin, Mirabeau, and Napoleon—heads which might really be con-

sidered *Memoirs* of the time. Nothing on Voltaire, nothing on Mirabeau (not even Carlyle's study), nothing on Napoleon has yet been written more soul-revealing than the busts of Houdon. Rodin, too, in this field has done memorable things; his Rochefort, Hugo, Berthelot, Puvis de Chavannes and Balzac are all superb, worthy to rank with the best. Just here, however, a certain bitterness comes to show in him:

> There is no work (he says) so ungrateful as this: the truer your portrait, the more like it is, the more it reveals character, the less your sitter will appreciate it. Men and women both want to have insignificant, regular features; masterpieces of expression are usually regarded as insults. One has simply to do one's best and pay no attention to the remonstrances of puerile conceit.

Like all the great moderns, Rodin is often preoccupied not with the subject, but the symbol. He has fashioned the head of a young woman imprisoned to the very neck in a rough block of marble. "Thought" he christens it—thought struggling for expression, without hands to help itself, thwarted and imprisoned as one without feet. Or take "Illusion, the Daughter of Icarus"—a young angel's figure with broken wing and face crushed against the hard ground of fact. No one of these attempts, in my opinion, can be called successful, simply because the striving itself, being purely intellectual, tran-

scends the sculptor's art. Two lines of Goethe are more expressive:

> All things transitory but as symbols are sent;
> Earth's insufficiency leads to event. . . .

Rodin is more successful when he asserts that all artists are necessarily religious, "believers by nature":

> No good sculptor (he says) can model a human figure without dwelling on the mystery of life; this individual and that in fleeting variation only remind him of the immanent type; he is led perpetually from the creature to the creator. . . . All the best work of any artist must be bathed, so to speak, in mystery. That is why many of my figures have a hand or foot still imprisoned in the marble-block; life is everywhere, but rarely indeed does it come to complete expression or the individual to perfect freedom. . . .

Then Rodin goes on to tell how as a youth he fell in love with the serene and typical beauty of the works of Phidias, and only later, after his first visit to Italy, came to appreciate the tortured strivings of Michelangelo. The great Florentine, he exclaims, was the last and greatest of Gothic sculptors. Like all great creators, Rodin is one of the most stimulating of critics, and in especial he finds deathless words to describe the Greeks, his masters. It is the accepted idea that the Greeks of the best

period treated their subjects with reverence as gods and goddesses, and showed their piety by only unveiling part of the human figure. While admitting that there is some little truth in this, Rodin insists that the spirit informing all their best work is an intense sensuality. "The human form," he says, "never moved any people to such sensual tenderness. The very ecstasy of sensual delight seems to be shed over every part of the figures they modelled." And any one who has ever studied the little women's figures with clinging draperies on the balustrade of the Temple of Nike Apteros must agree with him. Passionate desire is the very soul of Greek plastic art.

And here comes naturally that chapter on "The Beauty of Women," which should be at the end of this book, and not in the middle, if the true *crescendo* of interest is to be observed, for this is Rodin's special kingdom. No decadent artist of them all, no master of the Renaissance, has equalled him in this field either as craftsman or lover, whether in skill of workmanship or in passionate appreciation of the loveliness of every curve and every round. His best girl-figures are the best ever modelled.

Rodin has now several studios, both at his home in Meudon and in Paris, but the one he prefers is in the old and famous Hôtel de Biron, which for ages was used as the Couvent du Sacré-Cœur. Here

generations of lovely and charming girls were educated, and from this retreat sent forth into the sinful world. Behind the hotel is an old, neglected garden, with trees and arbors and winding walks. In the shade here one still seems to hear the ripple of girl laughter, or sees hot cheeks flushing with whispered confidences. Looking out over this garden is the great room which Rodin keeps for his drawings and modellings of women. Let us listen to him on his own subject. Gsell asks him: "Is it easy to find beautiful models?" Rodin answers: "Yes." "Does the figure keep its beauty for long?" The master replies:

"It changes incessantly, as a landscape changes with the sun. The perfect bloom of youth, the flower-time when the slight figure is as graceful as the stem of a lily, only lasts for a few short months. . . . The young girl becomes a woman and her beauty changes its character—admirable still, it is perhaps not quite so lovely pure."

"Do you think the Greeks were more beautiful than modern women, or have you as fine models as posed for Phidias?"

"Just as fine. Modern Italian girls have all the peculiarities of the best Greek type: the essential character of it is that the shoulders are practically as broad as the hips."

"But our French women?"

"Generally, like the Germanic races and the Russians, they have narrow shoulders and large hips: this is the characteristic of the nymphs of Goujon, the Venus of Watteau, the Diana of Houdon."

"Which is the most beautiful type?"

"Who shall say? There are hundreds of beautiful types. I have modelled little Eastern dancers whose finger-slim ankles and soft round outlines had an infinite and perverse seduction. On the other hand, the Japanese actress Hanako seemed to have no fat on her body; her muscles were all outlined and firm like those of a little fox-terrier. She was so strong that she could stand on one foot and hold the other leg at right angles with her body for ever so long; she seemed to take root in the ground like a tree; but there was a rare beauty in her singular vigour. There is nothing commoner than beauty for those who have eyes to see. . . . I often get a girl to sit on the ground just to study the adorable vase-like outlines of her torso, the sacred amphora which holds in it the promise of future life. Look at that shoulder: I have modelled the curve of it a dozen times and yet it could be improved. Often and often beauty overpowers me so that I feel like going on my knees to it. His art is a religion to the artist."

And here is Rodin's contribution to social science:

"Ah, they pretend that Art has not utility: It has the greatest; everything that makes for happiness is of the highest usefulness. And it must never be forgotten that we artists are the only moderns who take joy in our work and find delight in labour. Every workman ought to be an artist, and take pleasure in his toil; every mason and carpenter and house-painter should have joy in his endeavour; but with our wretched modern wage-system we

have almost banished joy out of life. It will come back; we artists will bring it back."

A memorable book, which sends me to have a look at that "Satyr and Nymph," which is one of the high-water marks, so to speak, of Rodin's achievement: a masterwork in which desire finds supreme expression and bronze takes on the satin-softness of woman's flesh.

I should like to connect whatever intimate facts I have gleaned about Rodin during our long friendship with these words of his on the utility of art, for they are curiously self-revealing. He told me that his beginnings were terribly difficult; for years he had to work as a stone-cutter for makers of figures to stand over graves. This practice made him capable of cutting a statue out of a block of marble like the sculptors of the renascence; "not many modern artists can do that," he used to say. The long apprenticeship had made him a great craftsman.

Even after he had produced his "Man With the Broken Nose," which was hailed as a masterpiece by all the critics in Paris, he had to go back to journeyman's work for months at a time in order to earn money to buy marble. "The worst of it is," he exclaimed, "that in those years I was full of ideas, pregnant with a thousand conceptions which never saw the light. This stupid modern competitive wage-system is a dreadful handicap to the real

artist. I could have done twice as much good work as I have done had I received as a young man a tenth part of the prices which are pressed upon me now when I have few ideas and can only work slowly. I don't believe I should ever have got through and done anything worth doing if it hadn't been for English amateurs; they bought my works long before they were saleable in Paris. 'A prophet,' you know, 'is not without honor save in his own country.'

"There's another point of general interest, it seems to me. As soon as I became known I was tempted to do portrait-busts and nothing but portraits, by the enormous sums offered me by American millionaires and their wives. I wanted to do ideal works, my work; but I was taken away very often by this meaningless portraiture that's only another form of journeyman's work. How can you refuse a man who offers you a blank cheque? It's the most devilish age for the artist, that has ever been."

Before beginning this pen-portrait I said that Rodin was inarticulate, words not being his medium, harder, indeed, for him to control than bronze or marble. He has often brought me groups of figures and asked me to name them: he had put a couple of figures together because of some emotional or passionate connection and he wanted a name for them: "Could they stand for any myth?" I remember one group, a woman's figure embracing a

man which I called *La Succube* and bought. He liked the name, but when I spoke of it at another time as "The Temptation of St. Antony," he was still more delighted and declared that he would make a large replica of it.

He spoke only French and even in French was not widely read, yet like all big men, he knew a great deal about masterpieces in other arts of which he didn't know even the grammar. When looking at his "Gate of Hell" he would be a bold man who would say that he knew Dante better than Rodin and yet Rodin had never read a word of the Inferno.

Rodin's life in the villa perched on the side of the hill at Meudon was that of the ordinary French *bourgeois:* his wife, who was about his own age, looked after the house and kitchen while he received some of the greatest people in the world in the little parlor. It seemed to me that though proud of his work, she was more concerned with his health.

In his later life Rodin was cruelly disappointed by the rejection of his "Balzac," ordered but not accepted by the French Society of *Gens des lettres.* That Frenchmen of letters were unable to understand his work filled him with foreboding; but the appreciation of English and German and Russian connoisseurs soon atoned for the absurd slight. His "Balzac" is an impressionist work and not a mere re-

production of reality and I am sure it will yet be regarded as one of his finest pieces of portraiture.

The last time I saw Rodin was two or three winters ago on the Riviera: he had aged greatly; he found it difficult to remember even friends and almost impossible to think of future plans. The sturdy workman's body seemed likely to outlive the soul.

As an artist Rodin's place is secure: he is unquestionably the greatest of the long line of notable French sculptors: indeed I am inclined to believe that he will stand with Donatello, Michelangelo and Phidias among the greatest of all time. And I am glad to believe that he knew this. I went with him some years ago to the British Museum. Though he had often talked of the splendid Assyrian lions, he went by preference to the works of the primitive artists of all countries, even to the wooden idols of the South-sea savages: here and there he picked one out for special praise: no excellence could escape him: again and again he would shake his head and mutter *un chef-d'œuvre*—a masterpiece. But before leaving he led the way to the so-called Elgin marbles, to the figures stolen from the Parthenon. Never shall I forget the emotion they called forth in him: with reverent fingers he touched the marble limbs; "every part, sheer perfection" he said again and again with trembling voice; "no one has ever equalled them, no one."

"Not Michelangelo, nor you?" I asked.

"No, no," he replied; adding quickly, "our work is different. . . . One must just be content with having done the best in one."

Rodin may indeed be content: for more than once he has experienced the truth of Burns's couplet:

> Who does the utmost that he can
> Will whiles dae mair.

ANATOLE FRANCE

BY universal consent Anatole France is the foremost man of letters in France today, the wisest and most articulate, if not the strongest or noblest of living Frenchmen.

Before I try to give a personal impression of him let us look at him for a moment as he appears to the casual acquaintance in the mirror of his writings.

As every one knows, his real name is Thibaut, he is the son of a Paris bookseller, and has led the most uneventful of lives. He had an excellent classical education, took to reading as a child, and was a writer before he was out of his teens. Almost at once he showed himself master of a style as simple and supple as Congreve's, but even more cunningly cadenced, and set off with flashes of ironic insight which delight the intellect. He has written a score of so-called novels in which the story is usually slight, and the characters, with one exception, are mere lay-figures—marionettes or abstractions. Yet all these books are interesting for the sake of the hero and of his reflections on life—the thoughts and feelings of a tolerant, cynical, unworldly wise observer filled to the lips with the milk of human

kindness. The hero is always the same character: Sylvestre Bonnard is blood brother to M. Bergeret, and Doctor Trublet only differs from them in name, and these are all studies for the famous Maître Jerome Coignard, who is at once scholar, priest, epicurean philosopher, and scoundrel. He drinks and cheats, plays pandar and libertine, borrows wine from an inn and runs off with his employer's diamonds, and yet when blessed with the curious learning, the philosophic thought, the tolerance and humor of dear M. Bonnard, he becomes the most lovable of scapegraces, and the finest portrait extant of Anatole France himself. We enjoy his company almost as much as we should enjoy Hamlet speaking in person. The lessons France teaches are those Renan taught, and Montaigne: he is as typical a Frenchman as Odysseus was a typical Greek—a convinced sceptic, disbelieving in any solution of life's mystery, and boldly preaching epicurean enjoyment of all life's pleasures, whether of sense, or soul, of taste or intellect, with widest tolerance of others' faults and follies, crimes and madnesses. All readers have come to love the Abbé Coignard as among the most notable and most lovable creations in all French literary art: the one organic figure given to literature since the Bazarof of Turgenief. A comparison between the Abbé Coignard and Hamlet would teach us a great deal about the differences between the French and the

English genius, and would at the same time show how widely the French Revolution with its realistic striving separates the modern world from the romantic past.

Now let us see how M. France in real life compares with his own most famous portrait.

Not a notable appearance, a man of sixty or sixty-five, silver-grey hair bristling up like a brush over his forehead, grey moustache and imperial. At first sight he looks like Napoleon the Third; his face an even longer oval; his eyes, the color of coffee beans, have heavy gummy bags under them; the flesh of cheeks and neck is discolored and sags a little—the stigmata of sense indulgence. Nearer seen the eyes are vivid, bright; no trace of exhaustion; eyes like his mind, eager and quick, perhaps even too quick; their vitality bearing witness to a certain moderation in his pursuit of pleasure.

A man of five feet seven or eight when standing upright, now bowed habitually, chin on chest, neck bent forward; carelessly dressed, brown camel-hair pajamas, silk-faced over a white knitted vest with black border; feet thrust in morocco slippers, whitish woollen socks—no affectation, no showing off, nothing but a desire of comfort.

He meets one with cordial courtesy, unaffected kindliness, one might call it. He was written to, but didn't answer. We called on him about ten o'clock one morning. He was not at home, had gone out

before nine, according to the pleasant manservant. My friend told me that when some men of letters a little while ago formed a literary club and wanted Anatole France to be president they wrote to him and called on him seven times before they found him. When at length they ran him to earth, he was charming to them, perfect in courtesy, and as kind as possible.

"He simply cannot be bothered to answer letters or to make appointments; you must take him as he is."

My experience confirmed this statement in detail. We were shown into a double dining-room, or rather into a continuation of the dining-room; primitive paintings on the walls, drawings of Corot, a woman's head in *sanguin* by Vanloo, and about the room old *bahuts* of Henry II. The window looked out on an oblong patch of greenery smaller than the room, ivy masking high walls at the back.

The master came in and drew us across the passage to his sitting-room—a middle-class double sitting-room with a seventeenth-century plan of Paris as a decoration for the whole ceiling. He asked us to forgive him for presenting us to a musician who happened to be with him. Two busts, one in marble and one in plaster, side by side on the chimney-piece caught my eye.

"Rousseau, is it not?" I asked.

"Rousseau," he replied, "the plaster is a cast of

the one in the Louvre, very good: the other in Carrara marble, author unknown, is interesting to me because of its similarity and its differences."

"I'm glad you like Primitives," I said at hazard. He caught me up quickly.

"I detest them now. I used to like them, but now they weary me, mean little to me."

"But they suit the old oak furniture of Henry II that I saw in your dining-room."

"I hate that, too," he cried. "I made every mistake a man could make; I loved old oak, old furniture, bought quantities of it, too big for my rooms, suitable only to a castle or great hall; at length stifled with it I got rid of it all, threw it all out. I have passed through all the fads in furniture and pictures and books."

"Outlived your Corot drawings?" I asked.

"Sucked them dry," he parried, smiling.

It was the morning after Carpentier's victory over Wells in the prize-ring, and I couldn't help asking the master what he thought of the way athletics are being taken up in France.

"Carpentier gives our youth self-esteem," he said, "his victory atones in some sort for Alsace-Lorraine"—he smiled with a pitying shrug.

"I always thought the next generation, the generation that didn't know '70 would show a new spirit," I said.

"It was to be foreseen," he agreed, "Bismarck

felt it. The old French conquering temper was sure to assert itself in time," and then the interest of the moment ran away with him, the proposal of the Ministry and President that men should serve three years in the French army instead of two excited his indignation, and he fell tooth and nail on the political leaders of the moment. No Englishman would have dreamed of talking of his chief politicians, the Asquiths and Balfours, Greys and Georges with the same contempt and disgust.

"Perfectly stupid, these politicians," he exclaimed, "incredibly stupid; no good even at their own game. They pretend to trim their sail to every breath of popular feeling and they can't even tell how the wind blows. They do not see that France will not have the service of three years.[1] We all know it only takes a year to make a soldier; they keep them for two years as it is, and now they want to increase the two to three. France won't have it, it's absurd.

"If they declared openly that they were going to shake off the German menace once for all and regain Alsace-Lorraine, France would march like one man, but this absurd and meaningless extension of service is merely showing off, and we won't have it."

A moment later he began to give instances of the crass stupidity of French politicians, and notably of F.....

"F..... is one of the best: yet he is stupid to

[1] This was written in the Summer of 1913.

a degree; his blunders are legendary: his denseness proverbial. An example: he had to go once to visit Rodin: I forget the occasion. Rodin, he was told by his official prompter, is a great sculptor, the greatest since Angelo, a master craftsman: he was advised—'it would be nice of you to say a complimentary word to him.'

"At his wit's end the Minister looked round the studio; on every hand statues, as he thought, defaced and broken, torsos of women, vase-like without limbs, here a head and there a plaster outline of hips or breast.

"Wishing to be sympathetic, the President at length found the kindly phrase:

" 'One sees that you, too, have suffered in your removals, M. Rodin.'

"It is perhaps too eminently stupid to be true, but the stupidity is characteristic of them all. . . .

"Another time a Minister of Public Instruction had to make a speech about the École de Médicine. Some doctor had written it for him, and in order to vary the phrase had spoken also of the Faculté de Médicine. The good bourgeois Minister, loving sounding phrases, talked of the École de la Faculté de Médicine. Next day the papers made fun of him, and an editor came to correct the mistake in the *Journal Officiel.*

" 'They made fun enough of me,' said the Minister, 'leave it alone—don't rub it in.'

"A certain common sense in the man chastening ignorance."

Fearing lest I should feel no interest in these French household affairs, so to speak, Anatole France tried courteously to draw me into the conversation.

"But you've politicians in England," he remarked, "and must know what they're like."

"Unfortunately Englishmen," I replied, "still regard their politicians as great men and important."

"Your conditions are different," he rejoined politely, "politics are not matters of life and death to you, but here in France the politicians have our lives in their hands. They should know their *métier* at least, but they don't. It isn't much to ask a man that he should know his trade, but they haven't even reached that level; they're inferior, I imagine, even to yours in England."

"They may be a little," I replied dubiously, "more especially in foreign politics. The aristocratic tradition in England gives the politician an inkling of his business. Sir Edward Grey is a politician who knows his *métier* by instinct, so to speak, the instinct of a governing class. It isn't much, that instinct, but he has it, and its effect is sometimes, as in this Balkan business, extraordinary."

"Our politicians haven't got it," replied France, "and don't seem able to get it. They're not capable and never will be; they're not even honest. I remem-

ber Panama, you see: they were all in it, of course: if they hadn't *touched* (and he made the significant gesture with finger and thumb) *c'était tout comme:* they had allowed others to steal. A word of one of them occurs to me. Speaking of a rival, he said, 'Poor fellow, he is so naïve, though he has had three Ministerial posts, he's still poor—stupid of him.'

"Your politicians are honest, at least: are they not?"

"Indifferent honest," I replied, "though this Marconi scandal shows that they find it increasingly difficult to keep their hands clean. As democracy advances, Ministers diminish in ability, and even more markedly in honesty, I imagine; but with us the professors are even a worse plague than the politicians."

"In France they're much better," cried France, "they know their business such as it is, and they're harmless, they've no power, whereas the politicians have power, even now they're leading France to a disaster. We can't rival Germany in numbers!"

Suddenly a new thought suggested itself and he was off on the fresh trail headlong.

"Numbers don't win battles: victory depends on the spirit of the troops, and to tell the truth a good deal on chance. You have a conquering army today, today week it'll be beaten. The more one studies the early victories of Napoleon, the more one sees that time and again his army was about to

run away when the Austrians turned tail first, *ils foutaient le camp plus tôt et tout était dit. . . .* (Another quick transition.)

"At this moment the spirit of France is excellent, couldn't be better indeed; but our politicians are dreadful . . . the Church in France is another bad influence, a reactionary influence and irrational. . . ."

Determined to bring him back to literature and enduring things I ventured to interrupt:

"Yet Renan always had an affection for it," I remarked, "and I always think of Renan and you as connected in some way, probably by the magic of an exquisite rhythmic prose."

Lightning-quick he flashed into the new field.

"And in a certain ironic acceptance of the facts and chances of life," he cried. "Renan was always a liberating influence; but I don't care for his dramas," and the eyebrows went up expressively.

"That's where one sees his kinship to Gounod," I added, "a sort of sister-soul in frank sensuality."

The young musician took this up eagerly:

"True indeed," he broke in, "and Gounod, too, was interesting. I was an organist at St. Cloud. Gounod used to come to the church often, he must have been seventy-five years of age then: yet *il servait la messe,* and did it with rare unction and dignity."

"Really," exclaimed France, hugely interested. "I thought he didn't believe in Christianity."

"He didn't," replied the musician, "but he loved to officiate at Mass; he was an actor born, and he acted that part with majesty."

"All artists are naturally actors," commented France; "but did old Gounod really take Communion?"

"No, no," replied the musician, "religion to Gounod was merely a subject of his art, as he shows in *Faust,* for example. But he used to love to serve the Mass surrounded by pretty women."

"I can see him at it," cried France, smiling; *"le beau sexe* always his weakness, wasn't it?"

"Surely," said the musician, "he was a lover even with one foot in the grave."

"Old men have a certain attraction for some women," France remarked, with a smile of ineffable complacent satisfaction.

"Maître," I broke in, again to bring the talk back to literature, "please tell me about your writing; Renan used to declare that his prose came to him easily, flowed from him, so to speak. Is that true of you? Or do you agree with Tolstoy that even simple prose is a matter of labor and pains?"

"To me writing's horribly difficult," replied France frankly, "horribly."

And then the qualification:

"But let's distinguish: *L'Ile des Pingouins* cost

me infinite labor because I wanted to make each small side issue as important as the main theme: it was chiefly embroidery, so to speak, and embroidery takes time and thought.

"*Les Dieus ont Soif* was comparatively easy because the main theme which I had in my head at the beginning was enough to fill the book. This was the theme; that ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances themselves become extraordinary. Gamelin was nothing much, an ordinary man, but in the great Revolution he became great, because the current about him was irresistible and gave him enormous force. One other idea: the political fanatic is very like the religious fanatic. Gamelin was by nature a Dominic as Dominic might have been a Gamelin. The two themes were really one and the same, and I therefore found it easy to write the book."

"And the new book *Les Anges?*" I asked.

"Oh, harder than ever," he cried, mimicking distress, "it's full of new ideas, and new ideas are extraordinarily difficult to express. My new book is about the revolt of the angels, and it is giving me infinite pains. I want to put into it more ideas than Dante or Milton ever had. That may sound conceited, but not when one's talking to intelligent people. One can then talk freely, sincerely. Neither Milton nor Dante had many new ideas on any subject, and I want to stuff this book full of new ideas, and that makes it hard, hard, every page an effort.

The better work one wishes to do," he added, "the harder it is."

"But doesn't the mere power of expression grow with use and become easier?"

"Not to me," he replied, "it all depends on the ideas. You can make your art as hard as you like, even in old age, especially in old age," he went on, "when you want to do your uttermost and the time is growing short."

There was a pathetic dignity, I thought, in the unconscious acceptance of the high task.

"Yet you found time to preside the other night at the Zola dinner," I remarked, "though one would have thought that you and Zola were poles apart."

"Quite true," he agreed, "I don't care much for his books except *L'Assommoir.* There are not enough ideas in them to interest me, and the quality of thought all through his work seems to me rather poor, but still he was always a Liberal, a Dreyfusard, too, never reactionary, and so when they came and asked me to preside at his dinner I could not refuse, though he always seemed to me a great mason rather than a great architect or artist. He took small interest in things of the spirit. A crowd was more to him than a thought."

"You once said, *cher maître,* that religion no longer existed in France: did you mean that literally?"

"Religion is dead in France," he repeated; "it can never be revived, nobody cares for it or pays

any attention to it; we have done for ever with monks and monkery. Even the Church is only a means of political action, or rather of reaction," he laughed, "but in England religion is still alive: is it not?"

"In England one can still find the corpse by one's nose," I remarked.

France laughed. "That's the very word: here the carcass is *desseché:* but in England still malodorous; we're a hundred years then ahead of you."

The assumption seemed to me daring.

"But is religion done with altogether, in your opinion?" I asked in some wonder.

"Certainly," he replied, apparently surprised even by the question, "the whole paraphernalia of miracles and belief in a life after death and an anthropomorphic God—all gone for ever, swept clean away—and a good thing too."

"Religion, then, is rather like measles, a childish complaint?" I probed.

"That's it, just that," he continued; "and we've got rid not only of the Christian religion, but also of the morality as well. Of course, Christian morality was absolutely childish and contradictory: we had to get quit of it all."

"But surely," I insisted, "one of these days we shall have a scientific morality. The laws of health both of body and spirit will be ascertained and taught. And when once the canon is accepted and

established, it will excite emotion and gradually become sacred, and so religion will again be brought back into life."

"I see no need of it," he retorted. *"On est sage en France,"* he went on earnestly: "we have the race morality of moderation in our bones: it's rather an æsthetical than an ethical ideal, if you will; but we are moderate and prudent by nature in everything, and that's all one wants in life."

"Men always need guidance," I replied tentatively, "the example of the nobler spirits as to how far individual selfishness should go, and how the need of self-sacrifice and devotion should be fulfilled. In these matters the man of genius will always come to be regarded as sacred, if not divine. Humanity will always need teachers."

"I don't agree with you," he retorted, smiling, "we'll learn to walk by frequent fallings. We French have an ideal of wise and moderate living in us; we have already the best ordered house in Europe: haven't we?"

"Certainly," I replied, "by far the healthiest and happiest of modern states."

"That's what exasperates us," he went on, "about this German menace. We want to put our house in order, to attend to this weakness, bring about that reform and realize our high ideal of social justice; but we are perpetually hindered by that barbarous menace on our frontier."

The political situation again absorbed his interest, and the talk only flitted from it occasionally to other subjects. I can only recall one literary judgment which perhaps deserves to be recorded.

"René de Gourmont," he said, "is one of the men I admire most in contemporary French literature: he always interests me."

Then we talked of a bust of the master himself that was just completed and a drawing from the bust, and he discussed the differences between these allied creations with acute understanding and as dispassionately as if he himself were not in any way concerned.

Words can hardly render the ingenuous simplicity, the transparent sincerity of the man: no slightest trace in him of affectation or pomposity: no pose of any sort. As far as manners go, Anatole France almost reaches perfection. His simple attitude towards his own work and towards friends and foreigners alike filled me with admiration. I had never met anything like it among men of my own race save in two famous instances: Thomas Bayard, the American Ambassador in London, was one; and Thomas Ellis, the Chief Whip at one time of the Welsh Liberal Party, was the other; both these men had the genius of perfect manners. Probably because of his astounding intellectual curiosity, Anatole France is engrossed by all the barren journalistic controversies of the time, though at heart more

deeply interested still in ideas for their own sake, and chiefly in those *aperçus* which throw light on man and man's relation to the universe. Like Meredith, he loves to flit about from thought to thought; but Meredith seemed to me mired in a convention of conduct, while France was bird free of all convention and contemptuous of mere sexual morality.

"Surely in England," he said, "that dreary Puritanism is merely hypocritical? You cannot for ever go on ignoring differences of sex."

"I believe with Voltaire," I replied, "that prudery of speech is always a sign of loose morals; when 'purity goes out of the manners, it takes refuge in the language.' "

"A fine piece of insight," he exclaimed; "but your detachment surprises me; I thought all Englishmen loved even the faults of their countrymen?"

"Nearly every man has a certain partiality for his own country and his own people," I replied, "but I am an American and feel that it is difficult for a writer or artist in England today to be patriotic. Englishmen as a rule despise both letters and art. In France you are free; men of letters are organized and respected; in England they are unorganized and disdained, and if any of them are honored it is sure to be some mediocrity who beats the patriotic drum, or wins popularity with sickly sentiment."

"You are much worse off, then, than we are," he

decided, "I have always understood that Englishment don't care much for the things of the spirit."

"An artist in England," I replied, "is regarded as if he were an acrobat, and a great writer and great man like Meredith is not so highly appreciated as a tenth-rate general or politician or explorer; indeed, he is on much the same level as a trick-bicyclist, or actor or dancer. Shakespeare was treated like a menial: Blake died in want of necessaries: and in our own day poets of the first rank have committed suicide out of sheer poverty. Literature and Art are less esteemed in London than in any other civilized capital except New York."

"Yet we have an idea," he objected, "that an aristocratic society is always more favorable to the artist or man of letters than a democracy; England, then, forms an exception to the rule?"

"No, no," I replied, "little as her barbarian aristocracy cares for art or letters, it still cares more than the middle class or the democracy. You have no idea how low the Anglo-Saxon standard of taste and knowledge is: George Ohnet in England would be more highly esteemed than a Flaubert or a Balzac; because he would have more readers and make more money."

"It is still, then, an advantage to be born a Frenchman," said Anatole France, and I could do nothing but admit that for the artist and writer, as for the majority of men, it certainly is an advantage.